NATION

Colonel, 40 soldiers booked for 'attacking' J&K cops

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BUSINESS

Amazon CEO meets PM; to invest $13B in AI

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

South Africa reaches World Cup knockout with 1-0 win over South Korea

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Metro delayed on Purple Line again, after door glitch

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Train services on Bengaluru's Namma Metro Purple Line were briefly delayed on Thursday evening after a train developed a door malfunction at Cubbon Park Metro Station. According to the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL), the doors of a stationary train failed to close properly. As a safety precaution, all passengers were deboarded before the issue was addressed. The incident took around 17 minutes to resolve, causing minor delays to five subsequent train services on the corridor. BMRCL said normal operations resumed shortly thereafter. The disruption comes days after a major technical failure on the Purple Line's underground section that halted services for several hours due to damage to power infrastructure. —*AGENCIES*

China, Bangladesh deepen Teesta river cooperation

BEIJING, 25 JUNE

Dhaka and Beijing on Thursday agreed to strengthen cooperation on the management of the Teesta and other rivers and signed 13 agreements to bolster bilateral ties following talks between Bangladeshi Prime Minister Tarique Rahman and Chinese Premier Li Qiang. The understanding on cooperation relating to the Teesta may have implications for Dhaka-New Delhi ties given India's sensitivity over the Teesta water-sharing issue. The understanding was reached at a meeting between Rahman, who is currently in Beijing, and Chinese Water Resources Minister Li Guoying, Spokesman of the Bangladeshi prime minister's office Mahdi Amin told reporters. —*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGES 3 AND 6

Govt considering per-person 7kg ration under AAY

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The government is considering shifting Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) foodgrain entitlement from a fixed 35kg per household per month to 7kg per person per month, a move that would benefit larger poor families.

The Department of Food and Public Distribution has proposed an amendment to the National Food Security Act, 2013, and the Food Ministry has invited public comments on the National Food Security (Amendment) Bill, 2026, until 13 July.

Under current law, AAY households, which are designated as the poorest, receive a flat 35kg per family regardless of size, while priority households receive 5kg per person per month. This means larger AAY families often receive less food per person than households considered less vulnerable.

Under the proposed design, a two-member AAY household would receive 14 kg per month, while a family of five or more would be entitled to the existing ceiling of 35kg. The government framed the amendment as part of its push to strengthen food and nutritional security, ensuring access to quality food at affordable price. —*PTI*

Thousands feared dead as 2 big quakes jolt Venezuela

164 confirmed dead, over 10,000 buried under rubble

CARACAS, 25 JUNE

Rescue teams raced against time on Thursday after two powerful earthquakes struck Venezuela a minute apart, killing at least 164 people, injuring nearly 1,000 and leaving thousands feared dead beneath collapsed buildings.

The US Geological Survey (USGS) warned the eventual death toll could exceed 10,000, with many people believed trapped under rubble in the country's worst-hit regions.

The twin earthquakes, measuring 7.2 and 7.5 in magnitude, struck near the Caribbean coast on Wednesday evening and were among the strongest to hit Venezuela in more than a century. The second quake was the strongest recorded in the country since 1900.

La Guaira state, north of Caracas, suffered the heaviest damage. Acting President Delcy Rodríguez described it as a "disaster zone", saying dozens of buildings had collapsed. Before-and-after images showed a 10-storey hotel reduced to rubble.

Television footage showed rescuers using power tools to cut through debris, while residents searched for missing relatives among collapsed structures and fallen power lines. Three children were pulled alive from the wreckage in La Guaira.

A man drives past earthquake-flattened homes in Venezuela's Catia La Mar —*PTI*

Rodríguez said rescue teams were being redeployed from across the country and appealed to businesses to provide heavy construction equipment. UN-certified search-and-rescue teams are also being sent to assist.

The first earthquake struck west of Moron, around 170 km from Caracas, at a depth of 22 km. A second, stronger quake followed a minute later at a depth of 10 km, according to the USGS.

A state of emergency has been declared. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington was deploying rescue teams, medical resources and humanitarian aid. He also reported damage to a runway at Caracas' international airport.

Elsewhere, a powerful 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck off Japan's Iwate Prefecture on Thursday, injuring at least four people and prompting temporary school closures in parts of Aomori and Iwate. Authorities reported no tsunami threat and no abnormalities at nuclear facilities, including Fukushima Daiichi.

In Nepal, a shallow earthquake measuring between 3.8 and 4.1 struck near Tamti in Jumla district in the west of the country. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Andhra CM Chandrababu Naidu, K'taka CM DK Shivakumar and Telangana CM Revanth Reddy in Koppal on Thursday —*SALAR*

K'taka, Andhra, T'gana vow to end river rows

33 Tungabhadra dam gates inaugurated

KOPPAL, 25 JUNE

The Chief Ministers of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana on Thursday agreed to work towards a permanent solution to inter-state water-sharing disputes.

The consensus was reached when Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy met Patil during the inauguration of 33 newly installed spillway gates at the Tungabhadra Dam here.

Addressing a public meeting, Patil said the three States had committed to resolving water issues amicably. "There was a time when Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu were constantly in conflict over water-sharing. Today, the Chief Ministers are on one platform and have pledged not to quarrel," he said.

> **Rivers from Ganga to the Cauveri must be linked. Once that happens, no one will be able to stop India's progress. India will become unstoppable.**
>
> —Chandrabau Naidu, Andhra CM

Patil added that the States had agreed that any decision taken by the Centre should ensure no State suffers injustice. He also said the Tungabhadra Dam had lost over 15 per cent of its storage capacity due to silt accumulation. The Centre is preparing a desilting plan to be executed by the States, which could raise storage capacity by 25-30 per cent. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Govt lifts curbs on commercial LPG supply as Iran crisis ends

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The government on Thursday restored liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies to commercial consumers such as hotels, restaurants and other businesses to pre-crisis levels, and lifted sector-specific restrictions imposed during the recent West Asia conflict, in a sign that energy supply concerns are easing as global markets stabilise.

The Petroleum Ministry, in a statement, said that restrictions on commercial LPG supplies had been lifted following an improvement in domestic production and the expected arrival of imported LPG cargoes.

The supply of bulk LPG, which had been suspended at the onset of the crisis, has also been partially resumed at 50 per cent of pre-crisis consumption levels.

The move marks the latest step by the government to unwind emergency measures introduced during the conflict, when fears of supply disruptions in West Asia prompted authorities to prioritise household cooking gas availability.

With supply conditions improving, authorities have now decided to reduce the diversion of C3-C4 streams to the LPG pool and restore allocations to petrochemical and other downstream industries, while ensuring domestic LPG production remains above 40,000 tonnes per day.

The government said uninterrupted LPG supplies to households remain its top priority and directed state-run oil companies to maintain databases of commercial consumers to improve supply. —*PTI*

Oil falls to pre-war levels, no change in fuel rates

New Delhi, 25 June: Global oil prices fell on Thursday to their lowest levels since before the Iran conflict, providing a boost for India, the world's third-largest crude importer. Brent crude dropped to around $72-73 a barrel, while US crude slipped below $70, wiping out the geopolitical risk premium that had pushed prices sharply higher during the conflict. However, retail fuel prices remained unchanged, with state-run oil companies yet to roll back the roughly Rs 7.50-per-litre increase in petrol and diesel prices imposed during the recent surge. **>>>More on Page 7**

K'TAKA EXCISE DEPT RUNS LIKE 'ORGANISED' GANG FOR BRIBES: ED

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The Enforcement Directorate alleged Karnataka's excise department was running as an "organised syndicate" for collecting bribes, seizing cash and jewellery worth over Rs 13 crore from excise officer YD Manjunath, brother-in-law of PWD Minister **Satish Jarkiholi**.

The agency claimed most officers had obtained liquor licences in the names of family members and were illegally running liquor businesses. Searches were conducted at 14 premises across Bengaluru, Mysuru, and Belagavi over systemic corruption and illegal wealth accumulation.

It said "key persons" raided were excise officials Manjunath, Jagdish Nayak and KM Thammanna, along with their family members, business partners, and associates.

The search operations resulted in the seizure of Rs 5.5 crore in cash, Rs 3.3 lakh in foreign currency, and gold jewellery valued at Rs 7.8 crore from the premises of Manjunath, his driver, family members, and his associates.

The network, the ED alleged, runs on corrupt money from excise shops paying fixed monthly bribes to field officers, with additional funds generated during licence renewals, shifts, and fresh issuances.

It said the bribe was "centrally pooled" and distributed by intermediaries and associates, who maintained an account of money received and paid in an unofficial cash book, which was seized from a premise. Individual officers used this money for personal consumption and investment in properties and businesses, according to the ED. It added that the income generated from these businesses was projected as generated from legal businesses, thus integrating the proceeds of crime into the regular economy. —*PTI*

ECI unveils SIR schedule for Karnataka

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of K'taka's electoral rolls has begun, with the exercise set to cover 5.55 crore voters across the State.

HERE ARE THE DATES

House-to-house visits by BLOs
30 JUNE TO 29 JULY

Publication of draft electoral roll
5 AUGUST

Period for filing claims and objections
5 AUG TO 4 SEPT

Notice phase for claims & objections
5 AUG TO 3 OCT

Publication of final electoral roll
7 OCT

Passport to now cost Rs 2,500 as govt hikes fees

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The government increased passport fees for the first time in nearly 14 years, raising the cost of a fresh passport to Rs 2,500 under the normal scheme and Rs 5,000 under the Tatkaal scheme with effect from 1 July.

A 36-page new passport or reissued one for applicants aged 18 and above will cost Rs 2,500 under the normal scheme, up from Rs 1,500, while the Tatkaal fee has been raised to Rs 5,000 from Rs 3,500.

The fee for a 60-page passport has been increased to Rs 3,500 under the normal category from Rs 2,000 and to Rs 6,000 under Tatkaal from Rs 4,000.

Applicants seeking replacement of lost or damaged passports will also have to pay more. A replacement 36-page passport will now cost Rs 5,000 under the normal scheme and Rs 7,500 under Tatkaal, while a 60-page replacement passport will cost Rs 6,000 and Rs 8,500, respectively.

For applicants below 18, a fresh or reissued 36-page passport will cost Rs 1,750 under the normal scheme and Rs 4,250 under Tatkaal. The fee for replacing a lost or damaged passport for minors is Rs 4,250 under the normal category and Rs 6,750 under Tatkaal.

PASSPORT PROOF FOR SIR: EC

Meanwhile, ECI officials said on Thursday that passports are among the 12 valid supporting documents required by voters to prove their eligibility to be on the voters' list under SIR.

They were responding to a question after the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated that a passport is not proof of citizenship quoting the Passport Act, 1967.—*Agencies*

>>>More on Page 3

BJP HAILS MOVE

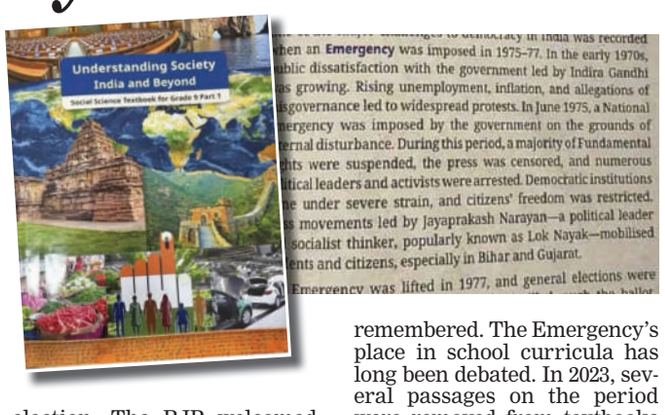
NCERT introduces section on Emergency in Class 9 book

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has introduced a section on the Emergency in its Class 9 social science textbook, calling it "one of the major challenges to democracy in India."

While the topic was included in the Class 12 curriculum in 2007 during the UPA government, this is the first time it has been part of the Class 9 syllabus.

The Emergency was imposed on 25 June, 1975, by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi following political unrest and a court verdict that invalidated her election. The BJP welcomed the move, saying the "dark chapter" in India's constitutional history should be remembered. The Emergency's place in school curricula has long been debated. In 2023, several passages on the period were removed from textbooks during a post-pandemic curriculum rationalisation exercise. —*PTI*


Understanding Society
India and Beyond
Social Science Textbook for Grade 9 Part 1
hen an Emergency was imposed in 1975–77. In the early 1970s,
ublic dissatisfaction with the government led by Indira Gandhi
as growing. Rising unemployment, inflation, and allegations of
governance led to widespread protests. In June 1975, a National
ergency was imposed by the government on the grounds of
ernal disturbance. During this period, a majority of Fundamental
hts were suspended, the press was censored, and numerous
itical leaders and activists were arrested. Democratic institutions
e under severe strain, and citizens' freedom was restricted.
s movements led by Jayaprakash Narayan—a political leader
socialist thinker, popularly known as Lok Nayak—mobilised
ents and citizens, especially in Bihar and Gujarat.
Emergency was lifted in 1977, and general elections were

NCERT DEFENDS 'KRISHNA' TITLE IN CLASS 6 KANNADA BOOK

NCERT on Thursday responded to saffronisation charge surrounding its newly introduced class 6 Kannada R3 textbook, clarifying that the title 'Krishna' refers to one of Karnataka's major rivers. A Karnataka-based education rights group had on Wednesday accused NCERT of attempting to "saffronise" the curriculum through the textbook.

>>>More on Page 2

Centre to procure Totapuri Mango amid price crash

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

The Centre has approved financial assistance for Karnataka's Totapuri mango growers under the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) providing relief to farmers amid a sharp price crash. Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy posted on X that he written to Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Shivraj Singh Chouhan about the price crash on 17 June. "He has now issued an order under the MIS to provide financial assistance of Rs 1,750 per quintal for 1,30,000 metric tonnes of Totapuri mangoes," the JD(S) leader announced on X. on Thursday. The Centre's reply to Kumaraswamy said: "The maximum differential payment between the MIP and the actual sale price will be capped at 25 per cent of the MIP. Farmers availing the benefit must sell their produce in notified APMC mandis in Karnataka. The Price Deficiency Payment scheme will be implemented for one month from the date of the first transaction following the issuance of the letter. Losses incurred during the implementation of the scheme will be shared equally between the Central and Karnataka governments on a 50:50 basis". *—SALAR NEWS*

Drinking water crisis looms as KRS & Kabini run dry

The crucial reservoirs are nearing 'dead storage' levels

MYSURU, 25 JUNE

The dismal Southwest monsoon spell this year has led to a rapid decline in the water levels of the Krishnaraja Sagar Reservoir (KRS) in Srirangapatna taluk and the Kabini Dam in HD Kote taluk, triggering fears of a massive drinking water crisis.

The KRS reservoir recorded its lowest water levels since 2018. As of 25 June, the water level dam stood at 81.08 feet (11.390 tmc feet) against the maximum level of 124.80 (49.452 tmc feet). The inflow to the dam is maintained at 577 cusecs and outflow at 1,668 cusecs.

However, the drop from last year, when it recorded its highest ever June water levels at 109.60 feet of water, is startling. It now has nearly 28 feet of less water than last year.

Of the 11.390 tmc feet in the reservoir, 4.400 tmc feet of water is "dead storage" - unusable volume of water held at the very bottom. Around 3.011 tmc feet is to be allocated for irrigation activities, while 3.979 tmc feet will be used for the drinking water needs of Mysuru, Mandya, Chamarajanagar, Bengaluru and dozens of other towns and cities along the Cauvery river basin districts. "The basin districts need 2tmc feet of water from KRS every month to meet drinking water needs," KRS Assistant Engineer Kishore estimated.

The situation is even more grim for the Kabini dam. Last year, it reached its full capacity in May - a first in 45 years – due to heavy rains in Kerala's Wayanad region.

Now, it has almost reached a dead storage level at 4.68 tmc, against its full capacity of 19.52 tmc feet, Kabini Reservoir Executive Engineer Vishwanath told Salar News. During the corresponding period last year, the water level stood at 15.89 tmc feet.

Vishwanath said that there is no sign of the inflow increasing in the coming months, and warned of a drinking water crisis.

In addition to providing drinking water and water for agriculture, these dams also are also a lifeline for wildlife havens such as Bandipur and Nagarahole National Parks, BRT and the MM Hills wildlife sanctuary.

Karnataka State Sugarcane Growers Association President Kurubur Shanthakumar said that if monsoon was playing "hide and seek", the government should "make alternative arrangements and save water in the Kabini dam for the coming months". *—Salar News*

COMPARISON TO LAST YEAR

KRS DAM HAS A MAXIMUM CAPACITY OF 49.452 TMC FT

June 2025:	June 2026:
44.19 tmc ft	11.39 tmc ft

Given that much of the water is 'dead storage' (4.400tmc ft), only 3.979 tmc ft of water can be used for drinking for Mysuru, Mandya, Chamarajanagar, Bengaluru and other regions.

KABINI DAM HAS A MAXIMUM CAPACITY OF 19.52 TMC FT

June 2025:	June 2026:
15.89 tmc ft	4.32 tmc ft

It has almost reached 'dead storage' levels (3.52tmc ft), and will also pose a threat to the water needs of wildlife in the Bandipur, Nagarahole Tiger Reserves and livestock.

Union Jal Shakt Minister CR Patil, Karnataka CM DK Shivakumar, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Telangana CM Revanth Reddy on Thursday —SALAR

Creating history in federalism: DKS on Tungabhadra meet

KOPPAL, 25 JUNE

Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar hailed the meeting with Andhra Pradesh Chief Ministers N Chandrababu Naidu and Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to inaugurate the new crests for the Tungabhadra reservoir as historic.

"The discussions we held over the course of an hour will go down in history in the country's irrigation and federal systems," Shivakumar said on Thursday. "Under the spirit of Our Water, Our Right, we have taken a historic decision to protect the farmers of three states."

"We discussed how to safeguard and protect farming families, including the appeal submitted by farmer leaders regarding saving the 33 TMC of water in this dam. After discussing all options, including the Navali reservoir and the matter of de-silting, we have all reached a consensus opinion," he said

"The discussion we held today over the course of an hour will go down in history in the country's irrigation and federal systems," he said, adding

The Tungabhadra Dam command area spans across regions of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. It supports vital agricultural and livelihood needs, relying on the Tungabhadra River's water.

One of the crest gates (19th gate) of the reservoir in Koppal district was washed away after its chain link snapped in August 2024, following which the downstream areas were put on alert as a huge quantity of water was being released. The incident occurred amid heavy inflows during the season.

Subsequently, based on the recommendations of experts, all 33 gates were replaced, according to official sources.

Reddy, meanwhile, appealed to the Union Minister for Jal Shakti CR Patil to find a permanent solution to the interstate water sharing issue of Tungabhadra river expeditiously.

Pointing out that farmers could use only five-six tmc ft of the allocated 17.9 tmc ft of water from the Rajolibanda Diversion Scheme (RDS) in Gadwal, Alampur, and Palamuru regions of Telangana, he said, another 10 tmc ft of allocated water was not being used due to various reasons. *—PTI*

Prepare to face 'Super El Nino' impact: DyCM

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Deputy Chief Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday directed officials to prepare for the possible impact of a "Super El Nino" event and potential drought conditions. Reviewing disaster management measures, he asked authorities to draw up district-wise plans for drinking water, fodder and water conservation. Officials said that 122 taluks face drinking water stress. Tankers are supplying water to 139 villages, and water is being sourced from private borewells in 669 villages. *–PTI*

M'RASHTRA WON'T RELEASE EXTRA KRISHNA WATER: SATISH

BELAGAVI, 25 JUNE

Officials from Maharashtra have told Karnataka that they are unable to release extra water from the Konya Dam into the Krishna river as the neighbouring state is facing an acute water shortage due to deficient rainfall, said Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi on Thursday.

At a press conference at the Deputy Commissioner's office in Belagavi, Jarkiholi noted that Karnataka had made similar requests in the past as well, but Maharashtra never released the water sought. Even in years when the Koyna Dam reservoir had adequate storage, Maharashtra government did not release water, citing its own water requirements. *—Salar News*

FIRs to be made mandatory for 'revenge porn': HM

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Home Minister Priyank Kharge, said in a post on X that he has asked his department to make First Information Reports (FIRs) mandatory in cases of revenge pornography, sextortion and blackmail videos. "Karnataka Police Department has issued Standing Order directing all police officers across the State to take strict and immediate action in cases involving the non-consensual publication, transmission or sharing of intimate/private images and videos," he wrote. He clarified that distributing such images or videos without consent is a cognisable, separate offence, even if the material was originally recorded with consent. "Consent to capture or record an image/video does not amount to consent for its dissemination," Priyank stated. "Police can't refuse or delay registration of complaints on the ground that the victim had earlier consented to recording."If a case is not registered due to prior consent, he warned of action against police officials. *—SALAR NEWS*

POCSO case in Kolar school triggers clashes

KOLAR, 25 JUNE

- A physics teacher at a private school near Kolar was arrested under the POCSO Act following allegations of sexual abuse of a minor student. Tension erupted on campus after the girl's parents confronted school authorities.

Tension prevailed at a private school on the outskirts of Kolar on Wednesday following allegations of sexual abuse involving a minor girl student.

Acting swiftly on the complaint, police arrested the accused, identified as Srikanth, a physics teacher in his early thirties and a native of Chintamani in Chikkaballapura district, under the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

According to sources, the girl's parents approached school management about the incident and were reportedly asked to visit the institution and review CCTV footage from the classroom.

When the parents arrived at the school, they confronted school staff and are said to have assaulted two employees.

On receiving information about the disturbance, a team of female police officers rushed to the school and arrested the accused.

The girl's parents lodged a complaint against members of the school management and staff, alleging that they had been assaulted.

In a counter-complaint, school management accused the parents of assaulting staff.

Police have registered cases based on the complaints and counter-complaints and are investigating the incident from all angles. *—Salar News*

IAF gets nod for ops of 'Netra' airborne warning, control system

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

India's indigenous Netra Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) system received Final Operational Clearance (FOC) on Thursday, marking a major milestone for the Indian Air Force and the country's defence self-reliance efforts.

The FOC was formally announced at the Centre for Airborne Systems by Air Marshal Awadhesh Kumar Bharti, who described it as a celebration of the partnership between the Indian Air Force and the scientific community in advancing Atmanirbhar Bharat. Bharti said the Air Force had been closely involved in the process alongside the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

DRDO's Director General (AERO), K Rajalakshmi Menon, said the system integrates advanced radar, electronic warfare and secure communication capabilities and is operational with the Indian Air Force. *—PTI*

BENGALURU ROADS, TAKE ME HOME

While the City races home through traffic, a balloon seller stands still - carrying joyful colours, hope and tomorrow's meal —MOHAMMED ASAD

B'luru man arrested for poaching peacocks

CHIKKABALLAPURA, 25 JUNE

Forest mobile crime branch officials from Bengaluru have arrested a person who was poaching peacocks and selling the birds' meat and bones. The incident took place near Reddy Golrahalli under Mandikal range in Chikkaballapura district on Tuesday and the arrested person has been identified as Sadiq Pasha, 50. According to sources, the crime branch conducted a raid on a farm house where they found the accused in possession of peacocks' meat, feathers and bones. The authorities also rescued a peacock which was in his possession and released it in the nearby forest area. Forest authorities say that of late, miscreants have been poaching the national bird in a bid to sell its meat as well as its bones to people who practice so-called black magic. *—SALAR NEWS*

'NON-VEG NOT OPPOSED'

Not promoting vegetarianism: NCERT on textbook row

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) on Thursday issued a clarification regarding the title and content of the Grade 6 Kannada R3 textbook, stating that the textbook neither promotes vegetarianism nor opposes non-vegetarian food.

This comes as former minister Madhu Bangarappa said, "It's very pathetic that the BJP has got a very cruel mentality of putting an ideological system into innocent children. Now, what they have done is you should eat only vegetarian... I think what the BJP is trying to do is basically to infuse ideologically based thoughts and create hatred in very young children as they grow up..."

The NCERT, in a press release, responded to these concerns by saying that a balanced diet is covered in Chapter 6 of the textbook, titled "Health is Wealth," which explains that a balanced diet includes food items such as milk, green leafy vegetables and fruits. It added that the illustrations in the chapter have both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food.

"Nowhere in the textbook is vegetarianism explained or justified, nor is non-vegetarian food opposed," the release stated.

The NCERT also said that the Kannada textbook has been titled "Krishna" after the river in Karnataka, as its language textbooks have all been named after Indian rivers."This approach is appropriate from a localised and cultural perspective," the NCERT said in the release. *—ANI*

Even MLAs can be deleted during SIR: BJP to workers

MYSURU, 25 JUNE

State BJP General Secretary Preetham Gowda told BJP members to take the Election Commission's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls seriously, as even sitting MLAs and former MLAs could be removed if they failed to provide exact information during the drive.

"This is not an exercise of deletion or inclusion of voters. A new voters list will be prepared by this exercise," Gowda said on Thursday at a Mysuru district BJP meeting held at a hotel.

He appealed to party workers, MLAs, Gram Panchayat members, MCC council members to treat the process with seriousness.

BJP'S FUTURE DEPENDS ON SIR

Gowda said that the party's future depends on the success of SIR.

"The increasing number of voters, voting percentage in upcoming elections will be an added advantage to BJP candidates in the country," he said. "It will be considered a setback for the party if they fail to be involved in this exercise."

He called upon party workers to open special desks and help citizens understand the documents required and ensure that genuine voters are not deleted.

'SIR NEEDED FOR ONOE, DELIMITATION'

Gowda said that the SIR exercise is also important in the larger interest of the party. It is crucial for the BJP's vision of achieving 'One Nation, One Election' and the delimitation exercise.

"The future of Indian elections will be decided not by the influence of caste. It will be decided by the success of SIR," he said.

—Salar News

I'm going to Bidadi tomorrow, hope to see you there: HDK to DKS

BENGALURU, 25 JUNE

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy on Thursday told Chief Minister DK Shivakumar that he would be going to Byramangala near Bidadi on 27 June and asked the Congress leader to visit the region on the day to discus the proposed Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township (GBIT) and the massive land acquisition for it. In a letter to the CM, Kumaraswamy said that he would be visiting the Bengaluru South district to hear "the grievances of those who will be affected" by the project and attached his schedule.

Earlier this week, Shivakumar invited the JD(S) leader to Vidhana Soudha on 26 June for an open debate for the 7,481 acres project that farmers have been protesting against, but Kumaraswamy declined due to commitments and sought for the debate to be held on 27 June. *—PTI*

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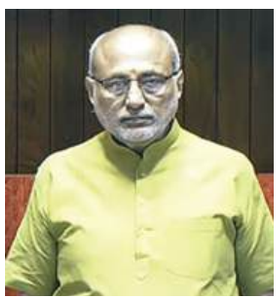
Raut seeks action against MP Sanjay over bomb threats

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut has written to Mumbai Police Commissioner Deven Bharti, demanding action against MP Sanjay Dina Patil over his alleged threat to "throw bombs" at protesters. Raut described Patil's remarks as terrorism and criminal intent, amid a political split that saw six MPs switch from Uddhav Thackeray's Sena to Eknath Shinde's faction. Raut claimed Patil threatened to kill protesters and suggested immediate searches for bombs at his residence with ATS assistance. He urged the police to investigate and register a murder case if Patil admitted to killing five people, warning that failure to act would compel him to seek legal remedies—*PTI*



VP Radhakrishnan administers oath to 10 new RS MPs

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan administers oath to ten newly elected members in the Upper House's main chamber. The lawmakers included four from Andhra Pradesh, two from Jharkhand, and one each from Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu. Sworn in members were Sana Sathish Babu, Vijay Chintakayala, Bhashyam Rama Krishna, Lingamaneni Ramesh, Tai Tagak, Rajesh Parmanad Shukla, Parimal Nathwani, Baidyanath Ram, Debashish Samantaray, and Praveen Chakravarty. Oaths were taken in Hindi, English, Tamil, and Telugu. Minister of State for Law Arjun Ram Meghwal and Secretary General PC Mody attended the ceremony in the parliament. —*PTI*

Sujata Karthikeyan joins BJD, Naveen to lead party

BHUBANESWAR, 25 JUNE

Former IAS officer Sujata Rout Karthikeyan, wife of Naveen Patnaik's close aide VK Pandian, has officially joined BJD as a member. Patnaik welcomed her, stating she would serve Odisha with sincerity and dedication. He reaffirmed, "I will lead the BJD in the next elections," insisting his leadership of the party remains unchanged. Sujata, from Odisha's Kendrapara district, served for 24 years and was credited with expanding Mission Shakti, women's empowerment programme. Her entry follows Pandian's withdrawal from active politics after the 2024 elections setback. Some leaders opposed her joining, blaming her husband Pandian for the poor election results, but she expressed her commitment to serve Odisha's people under Naveen Patnaik's leadership —*PTI*

Jharkhand HC clears CM in election code case

RANCHI, 25 JUNE

The Jharkhand High Court on Thursday quashed criminal proceedings against Chief Minister Hemant Soren in a case related to the violation of the model code of conduct during the 2014 assembly elections. Soren was facing prosecution before a district court in West Singhbhum district in connection with the case. Justice Anil Kumar Choudhary set aside the proceedings after hearing the matter at length. An FIR was lodged at Adityapur police station in 2014 alleging violation of the model code of conduct by Soren. The chief minister had moved the high court, which had earlier stayed the criminal proceedings against him. Soren's counsel contended that no violation of the MCC took place and alleged that the FIR was lodged due to political vendetta.—*PTI*

Shah meets Prez amid Cabinet reshuffle buzz

The meeting comes 2 days after Modi called on Murmu

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Speculation over an imminent reshuffle of the Union Council of Ministers intensified on Thursday after Union Home Minister Amit Shah called on President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The meeting came two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the President, fuelling expectations of the first major ministerial rejig since the BJP-led NDA returned to power for a third consecutive term in June 2024.

The reshuffle buzz has gathered pace following the exit of two ministers whose Rajya Sabha terms ended on 21 June. George Kurian resigned as Minister of State for Minority Affairs and Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying after the BJP chose not to renominate him. Minister of State for Railways and Food Processing Industries Ravneet Singh Bittu has also not been renominated.

Several ministers have meanwhile been assigned organisational responsibilities, triggering speculation about a separation of party and government roles in line with the BJP's "one person, one post" principle. Union the Minister of State Harsh Malhotra has been appointed Delhi BJP chief, while Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary heads the party's Uttar Pradesh unit.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah meets President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi, on Thursday –*PTI*

- Speculation over an imminent reshuffle of the Union Council of Ministers intensified on Thursday after Union Home Minister Amit Shah called on President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The meeting came two days after Prime Minister Modi met the President, fuelling expectations of the first major rejig since the BJP-led NDA returned to power in 2024

Party sources said electoral considerations are likely to influence any reshuffle. With assembly elections due in several states in 2027, including Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, the BJP may seek greater representation for poll-bound states in both the Union government and party organisation. Leaders from states that recently went to the polls are also expected to find a place.

The NDA's internal equations have also shifted. The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena's strength in the Lok Sabha has risen to 13 after six MPs defected from Shiv Sena (UBT), making it the alliance's second-largest constituent after the Telugu Desam Party.

Sources said the BJP is also considering gubernatorial or diplomatic roles for some senior leaders. Kurian, regarded as a prominent Christian face in Kerala, is among those being discussed for a gubernatorial post.

Former Union minister Dinesh Trivedi was recently appointed India's High Commissioner to neighbouring Bangladesh. A wider organisational overhaul has been expected since Nitin Nabin took over as BJP president earlier this year.. —*ANI*

ENVOY GETS UNION MINISTER STATUS

India to issue visas to B'deshis from 28 June

DHAKA, 25 JUNE

India's new High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Dinesh Trivedi, formally assumed office in Dhaka on Thursday and announced the resumption of travel visas for Bangladeshi nationals, nearly two years after they were suspended amid strained bilateral relations.

The 76-year-old Bharatiya Janata Party leader presented his credentials to Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin at the Bangabhaban presidential palace, becoming the first politician to serve as India's envoy to the neighbouring country. Shortly after the ceremony, Trivedi visited the Indian Visa Centre in Dhaka and announced that applications for general travel visas would be accepted from 28 June. Urgent medical visas will continue to be issued on humanitarian grounds.

Travel visas allow Bangladeshi citizens to visit India for tourism, medical treatment, business, official work and onward travel to third countries.

A day before assuming office, the Centre granted Trivedi status equivalent to a Union Cabinet minister in the Table of Precedence for ceremonial purposes. An order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs clarified that the designation is personal to him and does not alter the existing Table of Precedence.

A former Union minister, Trivedi was appointed High Commissioner on April 27 and succeeded career diplomat Pranay Kumar Verma. He arrived in Bangladesh via the Benapole-Petrapole land border on 12 June.

His appointment comes as New Delhi and Dhaka seek to rebuild ties that deteriorated following the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in August 2024. —*PTI*

Dinesh Trivedi and Mohammed Shahabuddin –*PTI*

Cong to launch nationwide campaign to demand Pradhan's resignation

AHMEDABAD, 25 JUNE

Opposition party Congress on Thursday announced a nationwide campaign from 30 June to demand Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate) (NEET-UG) 2026 paper leak.

In the first phase of this 40-day campaign titled 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' (Voice of Students), Congress will organise demonstrations outside district collector offices in the 28 cities on 1 August. The phase will culminate with a "Delhi Chalo" protest march on 9 August, a party leader said.

The party also announced the nationwide outreach campaign will cover 28 cities, targeting students, job aspirants, coaching hubs, college campuses and libraries. Congress leaders will conduct leaflet distribution drives, street-corner meetings and campus outreach activities.

Congress leader Satej Patil alleged that repeated examination irregularities had created a "massive trust deficit" among students. The party further demanded an inquiry into the functioning of the NTA and its examination processes, paper-setting mechanisms, printing and transportation systems, infrastructure and contracts.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday hit out at Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for his "terrorist" remark against protesting students, saying he must immediately apologise and resign for his "failures."

In a post on X, he said labelling anyone who questions the government as a "traitor" is BJP politics. —*PTI*

STALIN CONDEMNS RAIDS

Vigilance raids DMK leader Velu's premises

Former Tamil Nadu PWD Minister EV Velu –*X/@EVVELU*

CHENNAI, 25 JUNE

The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) on Thursday carried out searches at several places linked to senior Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader EV Velu in the state, drawing a sharp response from party chief MK Stalin.

The searches were being carried out in connection with a corruption case.

Velu held the Public Works, Highways, and Minor Ports portfolio during the 2021-26 DMK government headed by Stalin.

Condemning the action, Stalin, on a social media platform, said Velu is fully cooperating with the authorities and will legally vindicate himself in court.

He also termed it a "politically motivated move."

Emphasising the party's resilience, he said, "The DMK is not an organisation that will succumb to such intimidation by the ruling party! We have faced far greater oppressions than this. We will confront this as well and emerge victorious." —*PTI*

Stalin drops hint on alliances, hits back at Joseph Vijay

TIRUVARUR, 25 JUNE

DMK chief MK Stalin on Thursday said his party will soon consider the growing public sentiment that it no longer needs alliances to face elections.

Speaking at a marriage function of a party functionary's family member, the former CM was responding to remarks made earlier by MP A Raja.

Pointing out that late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi always kept alliances safe, Stalin affirmed that he would not let go of any alliance partnet. The DMK leader also launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay, after Vijay mockingly inquired about the whereabouts of Stalin to taunt Leader of Opposition Udhayanidhi Stalin in the assembly recently.

"Whether I am in the Assembly or not, I am in the people's forum," Stalin retorted.

Taking a sharp dig at the administration, Stalin advised Vijay to look at government files instead of searching for him in the Assembly.

Stalin also criticised the current government over administrative issues, pointing to ongoing power cuts and the alleged failure to release water for Delta farmers on time. —*PTI*

Eight named in FIR, 2 arrested in Ayodhya Ram Temple scam

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

An FIR has been registered in the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, naming eight persons, with two arrested and six others taken into custody.

The case has been filed under BNS provisions on the directions of the UP government. The three-member SIT, constituted on 14 June following a request from the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir Trust, has submitted an initial report to UP Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Sanjay Prasad. Findings point to discrepancies in the accounting of gold, silver jewellery, and precious stones offered by devotees, with several office-bearers unable to explain their inventory and storage. The probe has since been expanded to cover land purchases and procurement of building materials.

VHP International President Alok Kumar called for immediate FIR registration and a fast-track court with daily hearings.

Media reports suggest trust officials Champat Rai, Alok Nishay, and Vinod Nishay have resigned on moral grounds, though Kumar said he was unaware of this.

The opposition has stepped up its attack, with Congress MP Tariq Anwar alleging a cover-up, SP president Akhilesh Yadav accusing the BJP of delaying the probe to destroy evidence, and AAP's Arvind Kejriwal announcing a temple visit on 26 June.

The row stems from allegations by former Samjawadi Party (SP) MLA Pawan Pandey that Rs 7–7.5 crore in donations were misappropriated.

A Supreme Court petition has also been filed seeking a CBI-monitored probe into financial irregularities at the trust. —*ANI*

Rahul says 'sorry' in defamation case

JABALPUR, 25 JUNE

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi has filed an application before the Madhya Pradesh High Court expressing regret for his allegedly defamatory statement about Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's son Kartikeya Singh. Meanwhile, the BJP said that Rahul should make "Sorry" his middle name after he expressed regret over his defamatory remarks against Kartikeya Singh, son of Union minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Kartikeya Singh had filed a defamation complaint in a Bhopal court against Rahul. His application, filed by his lawyer on Wednesday, said his statement was not connected to Singh.

In the defamation complaint lodged in the Bhopal court for cases against MPs-MLAs, Kartikeya Singh alleged that during an election rally in Jhabua in 2018, Rahul mentioned his name while referring to the Panama Papers scandal.

The court issued a summons to Rahul for personal appearance, following which the Congress leader moved the HC seeking to quash the summons as well as the defamation case.

Justice Pramod Kumar Agarwal will hear Rahul's petition on Thursday.

The petitioner on Wednesday produced the records of the lower court, as directed by the HC.

Advocate Sankalp Kochhar represented the complainant before the high court. —*PTI*

MANN CLAIMS MAN SEEN IN VIDEO IS WEARING MASK

CHANDIGARH, 25 JUNE

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday denied appearing in a controversial video, claiming the man in the clip wore a mask resembling his face. He identified Canada-based NRI Jagman Samra as the one who brought the mask, adding the video was made in Canada, where he has not travelled since 2016. Mann said the man's height and physique did not match his, and his mole on the neck was not visible either. He promised to reveal those behind the video soon, and he also accused the Congress, SAD, and BJP of conspiring to defame him through religious issues.

The Haryana Police on Tuesday arrested two men regarding the alleged procurement of a fabricated forensic report related to a viral video linked to the controversy involving him.

The row erupted after the Akal Takht, issued an edict against Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann on 15 June over an objectionable video. The Jathedar claimed two forensic labs had authenticated the clip, which shows a man resembling Mann.

The matter follows Mann's summoning by the Akal Takht in January over comments on gurdwara donations and objectionable activities involving images of Sikh Gurus and militant Bhindranwale. Opposition parties have demanded his resignation and an FIR under the anti-sacrilege law. —*PTI*

PARTY CITES PASSPORTS ACT 1967

Passport alone not proof of citizenship: BJP backs MEA

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The BJP on Thursday asserted that the government has not introduced any new rule regarding passports, saying the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has merely reiterated a long-settled legal position that a passport alone is not conclusive proof of Indian citizenship.

The BJP cited the Passports Act, 1967, and judicial rulings, including a 2013 Bombay High Court judgment, to contend that citizenship is determined as per the Citizenship Act, 1955, and not by the possession of any single document.

An Indian passport–*PTI*

The remarks came after a controversy erupted over the MEA's assertion that an Indian passport is primarily a travel document and not, by itself, proof of citizenship.

The BJP IT department head Amit Malviya attacked the opposition, describing them as the "kagaz nahin dikhayenge" brigade and accusing them of sensationalising a settled legal position for political reasons.

- The BJP cited the Passports Act, 1967, and judicial rulings, including a 2013 Bombay High Court judgment, to contend that citizenship is determined as per the Citizenship Act

"The MEA has not announced a new policy. It has merely reiterated a settled legal position," Malviya said on X. He said Indian courts have repeatedly held that a passport is not conclusive proof of citizenship and cited the Bombay HC's 2013 judgment, saying the principle has been reaffirmed subsequently.

Malviya said citizenship is established through a combination of records, including birth certificates, parents' citizenship records, school records, electoral roll entries, government service records, land and residence records, passports and other official documents. —*PTI*

—SCREENGRAB

M'rashtra NEET candidate records video, ends life

HINGOLI, 24 JUNE

An 18-year-old student from Maharashtra's Hingoli, Sushil Dhage, who recently took the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate) (NEET-UG) re-test, allegedly died by suicide after recording a video for his mother on his mobile phone, officials said on Thursday. A probe is underway to determine whether the extreme step taken had anything to do with the examination conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) amid claims by his family that he had found the retest difficult and was disappointed, they said. *—PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

Man dies in UP hospital, kin blames delay

BALLIA, 25 JUNE

Family and villagers protested at a district hospital here after a 40-year-old man died due to alleged delayed treatment. Avinash Singh was injured in a tractor-trolley accident in Khori Pakad village early Thursday. His family claimed no doctor was available when he arrived at the hospital, and his brother, Alok Kumar, stated that the doctor examined him but he died due to lack of timely care. The Chief Medical Officer ordered an investigation, and a committee was formed to look into the lapse. Fefna SHO Akhilesh Pandey confirmed that police reached the hospital after the protest. The incident highlights concerns over emergency medical response at local health facilities. *—PTI*

5 held for non-veg party on Ganga boat get bail

VARANASI, 25 JUNE

Five men arrested for allegedly holding a non-vegetarian party and consuming liquor on a boat in the Ganga river were granted bail. The accused, including Deepak Kumar, Ajay Sahni, Arun Kumar Sahni, Anurag Nishad, and Rahul Sahni, were released after furnishing two sureties of Rs 20,000 each. Their arrest followed a viral video showing the group with food and drinks on the boat. Police identified and seized the vessel. Earlier, in March, 14 youths were arrested for a similar incident involving a boat party, later granted bail by the Allahabad High Court. The case drew attention to social media's role in such violations. *—PTI*

—INSTAGRAM

Two held for Guru Randhawa gym firing incident

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Delhi Police's Special Cell arrested two suspects, Haqeeqat and Sagar, after a brief shootout in Paschim Vihar linked to the June 11 firing outside Punjabi singer Guru Randhawa's gym. The suspects, believed to be associates of Lawrence Bishnoi, had been on the run since the incident. They sustained leg injuries during the exchange and were detained. Police recovered weapons from them. Earlier, two others, Arman and Tushar, also linked to the case, were arrested in Bahadurgarh. The four are believed to be connected to the gang operating from the United States, with the attack reportedly targeting Randhawa over his association with Salman Khan, seen as an adversary by the gang. *—PTI*

Col, 40 soldiers booked for 'attacking' J&K cops

Police had seized Army man's vehicle for traffic violation

JAMMU, 25 JUNE

The J&K police have booked a colonel, a major and nearly 40 other Army servicemen for attempt to murder and other charges after an alleged attack on a police station in Kishtwar district, prompting the Army to order a joint investigation.

The Army said the matter is being probed and assured that appropriate action will be taken based on the joint investigation.

The incident occurred after a police party intercepted and seized a private vehicle owned by an Army official for alleged traffic violations.

The FIR registered at Atholi police station said that the incident occurred on Wednesday when the SHO, Inspector Amrit Kotach, was away for a meeting at the office of the Paddar BDO, chaired by the deputy commissioner.

In his complaint, Kotach stated that he received a call about the assault on the police station as per the orders of the CO, 17 Rashtriya Rifles (RR), N Arun Gandhi.

Around 40 servicemen from 17 RR, Camp Kijayee, led by Major Sharma and Naib Subedar Shankar Gurkhe, 'attacked' the police station—*ANI*

Around 30 to 40 servicemen from 17 RR, Camp Kijayee, led by Major Vikash Sharma and Naib Subedar Shankar Gurkhe, launched a "pre-planned" attack after scaling the main gate and boundary wall of the police station. They were armed with lathis, iron rods and other weapons, the SHO said.

The FIR, said the servicemen allegedly tore Kotach's uniform and also assaulted SDPO Vijay Kumar Bhagat, who had also reached the spot.

- The FIR names Colonel Gandhi, Major Sharma, Naib Subedar Gurkhe, Sepoys Raj Kumar, Rahul Kumar, Anoop Singh, Omkar Ingale, and unidentified soldiers of the 17th RR camp as accused individuals

The SHO said SPO Suresh Kumar was struck on the neck with the butt of a rifle.

The FIR also stated the servicemen assaulted the ARTO of Kishtwar and his PSOs inside the police station building

The attackers also caused extensive damage to government property.

The FIR names Colonel Gandhi, Major Sharma, Naib Subedar Gurkhe, Sepoys Raj Kumar, Rahul Kumar, Anoop Singh and Omkar Ingale, and unidentified soldiers of the 17 RR camp as accused. *—PTI*

FINAL ROLL ON 1 OCTOBER

SIR begins in Telangana; 36K BLOs deployed

HYDERABAD, 25 JUNE

The house-to-house enumeration for SIR commenced in Telangana on Thursday, with nearly 36,000 BLOs deployed, officials said.

Chief Electoral Officer C Sudharsan Reddy said the door-to-door exercise will continue until 24 July, after which the draft electoral roll will be published on 31 July. The final roll will be published on 1 October after considering objections.

"The Election Commission does not intend to remove voters arbitrarily. Genuine voters need not worry. The main challenge would be time," Reddy said.

He said that nearly 3,500 supervisors would oversee the BLOs, and around 1,000 senior officials would monitor the exercise.

Telangana has over 3.38 crore voters (as of 2025), of whom 2.38 crore had been mapped as of 20 June, official sources said, adding that nearly 90 lakh electors had been identified with anomalies.

During their door-to-door visits, BLOs will distribute enumeration forms and assist voters in filling them out.

About 49,000 BLAs have also been trained to assist BLOs in the enumeration process.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Wednesday warned of action against any leader found violating the party's instructions regarding the implementation of SIR.

Participating in a Zoom meeting on SIR with party leaders, the CM asked ministers, MLAs, MPs and constituency in-charges to remain alert during SIR. *— PTI*

QR codes must on vaccines, antimicrobials, cancer drugs

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The government has expanded the ambit of the QR code-based track-and-trace mechanism to cover all antimicrobials, vaccines, anti-cancer medicines, and narcotic and psychotropic drugs, a move aimed at strengthening safeguards against counterfeit medicines.

The Union Health Ministry has notified amendments to the Drugs Rules, 1945, bringing these categories of medicines under Schedule H2, which mandates the use of bar codes or QR codes for product identification and verification.

The QR code will contain a product identification code, generic and brand names, manufacturer's name and address, batch number, manufacturing and expiry dates, manufacturing licence number, and details of excipients.

The ministry said the requirement was earlier applicable only to the top 300 pharmaceutical brands.

Now its coverage has been expanded to include all vaccines, antimicrobials, anti-cancer drugs, and narcotic and psychotropic medicines.

The provisions relating to vaccines, anti-cancer medicines, and narcotic and psychotropic drugs will come into force from July 1 while those relating to antimicrobials will become effective from 1 July 2028, the notification said.

VACCINE BLAMED

A man from Nashik has claimed that his 17-year-old daughter died after being administered a dose of tetanus-diphtheria vaccine, prompting the authorities to order a probe.

City resident Anil Patil told the media that his daughter Shravani Patil received a "Td booster" dose as part of a vaccination drive in the Khutwadnagar area of the city on Wednesday.

However, she soon collapsed and was rushed to the district hospital, where doctors declared her dead, said the father. *— PTI*

Air Suvidha launched amid Ebola scare

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

An upgraded version of the air passenger health self-declaration portal Air Suvidha has been launched to enhance public health surveillance amid the Ebola outbreak in certain parts of Africa.

The civil aviation ministry and the Delhi airport operator DIAL launched Air Suvidha 2.0 on Thursday.

Developed in collaboration with DGHS, the portal enables International passengers to submit a mandatory online health self-declaration.

The declaration will cover 21-day travel history, exposure history and related symptoms, if any, prior to immigration clearance, an official release on Thursday.

Air Suvidha Self Declaration Form (SDF) can be completed 24 hours in advance by passengers before they arrive in India.

All International travellers coming to India have to submit their self-declarations in advance.

The civil aviation ministry in the release said the portal enables real-time data sharing with the airport health officer, Bureau of Immigration, IDSP, and state surveillance officers.

Also, the portal will enable swift identification and referral of at-risk travellers while keeping the arrival experience seamless and contactless, with no physical forms to fill on landing, it added.

Air Suvidha portal was earlier operationalised during the coronavirus pandemic a few years ago. *— PTI*

Cops: Delhi cabbie accused of killing girl was impotent

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The cab driver accused of kidnapping and murdering an 11-year-old girl in Delhi allegedly told the police that he had returned from Bihar around 15 days ago and was looking to have sex when he spotted the child sleeping beside her family on a pavement, investigators said.

Police said the accused, Bashu Kumar Singh, 29, allegedly abducted the girl from the Chhatarpur metro station area in Mehrauli early on 22 June while she was sleeping.

During interrogation, Singh allegedly told police that he initially calmed the child by promising to take her for a ride and drop her back home, officials said on Wednesday.

Investigators said the girl, who was drowsy when she was abducted, fell asleep again in the car as Singh drove around 10 to 12 kilometres towards Mandi Road.

Police said Singh attempted to rape the child in the rear seat of the vehicle, but was unable to do so due to erectile dysfunction (ED)

He threatened the girl against raising an alarm and then drove her to a secluded forested stretch near the Faridabad-Gurugram border, where he allegedly killed her and dumped the body, the officials said.

Police sources said Singh's medical examination has confirmed ED.

Delhi Police is preparing to issue notices to three major cab aggregators linked to Singh, seeking details of his verification process. *— PTI*

HC clears mangrove removal for Vadhvan Port

MUMBAI/PALGHAR, 25 JUNE

The Bombay High Court has paved the way for the rapid progress of the Vadhvan Port Project in Maharashtra's Palghar district by granting permission to remove mangrove patches within the approach area of the near-shore reclamation zone.

Justices Bharati Dangre and Manjusha Deshpande stated the project is of public importance.

The court allowed the NHAI to fell 208 mangrove trees for an eight-lane highway linking the port to NH-48, confirming all environmental, coastal regulation zone, and forest clearances, along with compliance on afforestation requirements. The court said the project was in the larger public interest and would provide vital connectivity to Vadhvan Port, identified as a nationally important infrastructure project.

"The project being of public utility, would provide connectivity to Vadhvan Port which is being developed as a major port on landlord port development model, opening opportunities for India to rank among the top 10 container ports," the court said. NHAI had previously sought court approval, complying with directives in a long-standing mangrove protection PIL. They had planted 1.33 lakh mangroves on 30 hectares and deposited over Rs 4.83 crore for compensatory afforestation. VVPL stated that key issues have been resolved, and the project will now proceed at full pace.

PM Modi laid the foundation stone for the Rs 76,220 crore port on 30 August 2024. *—PTI*

Kolkata warehouse crash toll rises to 11, Army uses radar for rescue

KOLKATA, 25 JUNE

The death toll from the Taratala warehouse collapse in south Kolkata has increased to 11, as rescue operations, aided by the Army's advanced ground-penetrating radar (GPR), continue into the second day. Nearly 21 hours after the incident, five more people were rescued, bringing the total rescued to 30. The warehouse, owned by Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, was under construction when it collapsed on Transport Depot Road.

The victims are Krishna Chowdhury, 30, Rohit, 40, Rahul, 17, Chandrama, 60, Pappu Rajak, 40, Azgar Hossain, 55, Sahil Sardar, 17, Ghee Kumar, 17, and two others yet to be identified. Another victim died overnight, raising the death toll. Authorities confirmed efforts remain focused on rescue.

The NDRF and the Army carry the body of a victim during a rescue operation after an under-construction warehouse collapsed on Wednesday, leaving 10 people dead and several others injured, in Kolkata's Taratala area *—PTI*

Five arrests have been made, including warehouse owner Shambhunath Behera, engineer Kamal Samanta, and others. Kolkata Police has registered a culpable homicide case, and is investigating structural safety violations and operational lapses.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari blamed the previous TMC administration, claiming the warehouse received approval despite design flaws. *— PTI*

LIQUOR TROUBLE

Bride rejects drunk groom in Chhattisgarh; cops honour her

JANJGIR, 25 JUNE

A 22-year-old woman refused to marry after finding her groom heavily drunk during the wedding ceremony, leading to a scuffle at the venue in Chhattisgarh's Janjgir-Champa district.

The woman, identified as Muskan Pradhan, was felicitated by Janjgir-Champa SP Vijay Kumar Pandey at his office here on Thursday for taking a stand against liquor, officials said.

Pradhan, a resident of Kosmanda village, was scheduled to marry Sant Ram, 24, a resident of Khokhra village, on 23 June.

The wedding procession reached Kosmanda at around

4 pm and the ceremony began soon afterwards. However, the groom was allegedly so drunk that he was unable to stand properly and Muskan refused to marry him.

After this, tensions flared between the two families. As the situation escalated, a team led by Champa police station SHO Ashok Vaishnav reached the venue.

Muskan told police that she had warned Sant Ram about his drinking after he arrived intoxicated during their engagement earlier. The groom had then promised that he would stop consuming liquor, Vaishnav said.

The groom's side has agreed to compensate the bride's family with around Rs 3 lakh towards expenses incurred for the wedding preparations, he added. The woman, educated up to Class 10, told reporters she wants to continue her studies. On Thursday, SP Vijay Pandey felicitated Muskan in the presence of social workers and women representatives. *— PTI*

Digital arrest scams: CBI conducts searches in 16 states

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Sixty teams of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has conducted searches at 80 locations in 16 states, from Punjab and Gujarat in the west to Assam and Manipur in the northeast, to dismantle a network that ensnared hundreds of people in digital arrest scams using a URL similar to that of the Supreme Court website, officials said Thursday.

The searches were part of 'Operation Chakra-VI' to nab the network allegedly linked to over 200 cases of cyber-enabled fraud.

"Based on a complaint received from the Registry of the Supreme Court of India, the CBI registered an FIR and commenced investigation into the matter," the agency's spokesperson said. *—PTI*

GIMS protest disrupts medical services, FIR filed

NOIDA, 25 JUNE

Police registered an FIR over alleged violence, obstruction of medical services, and damage to property during an ongoing protest by outsourced employees at the Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) in Greater Noida.

The case was registered on the complaint of GIMS Director Brig (Dr) Rakesh Gupta following unrest at the institute, where outsourced employees were staging a protest since 15 June, demanding regularisation of their services.

According to the police, repeated efforts were made to persuade the protesters to shift from the hospital's main entrance and hall to ensure proper functioning of medical services on Wednesday. However, authorities say some protesters turned aggressive and damaged government property

They stated that the incident also disrupted the treatment of patients and affected law and order.

GIMS Director Brig (Dr) Rakesh Gupta denied claims of a lathi-charge, calling them attempts to defame the institution. Staff alleged that electricity and CCTV were switched off overnight, and the gates were locked. Medical services have since resumed. *— PTI*

Future gens must know of dark Emergency: Pradhan

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan speaks to the media, in Chandigarh on Thursday —ANI

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday welcomed the National Council of Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) decision to introduce a section on the Emergency in Class IX textbooks, saying future generations should be aware of the dark deeds of that period to ensure such circumstances do not recur.

Speaking to reporters, Pradhan said, "This is correct. NCERT has done the right thing. Future generations should know and understand the dark deeds of the Emergency so that such a situation does not arise again. That is why NCERT brought it to the forefront. NCERT did a good job..."

The NCERT has, for the first time, introduced the topic in a Class 9 textbook, presenting it as "one of the major challenges," as the majority of fundamental rights were suspended.

The reference appears in the newly developed Social Science textbook, Understanding Society: India and Beyond, where the Emergency has been included in a chapter examining the strengths and challenges of Indian democracy.

An official at NCERT has confirmed that this is the first time that a section on Emergency has been added in the Class 9th textbook.

The inclusion marks a significant addition to the school curriculum, coming as the country recently observed 50 years since the declaration of the Emergency in 1975.

"One of the major challenges to democracy in India was recorded when an Emergency was imposed in 1975-77. In the early 1970s, public dissatisfaction with the government led by Indira Gandhi was growing. Rising unemployment, inflation, and allegations of misgovernance led to widespread protests," the section reads.

"In June 1975, a National Emergency was imposed by the government on the grounds of internal disturbance. During this period, a majority of Fundamental Rights were suspended, the press was censored, and numerous political leaders and activists were arrested. Democratic institutions came under severe strain, and citizens' freedom was restricted," it added.

The book also highlighted the role of Jayaprakash Narayan in the movement against the Emergency.

"Mass movements led by Jayaprakash Narayan -a political leader and socialist thinker, popularly known as Lok Nayak-mobilised students and citizens, especially in Bihar and Gujarat. The Emergency was lifted in 1977, and general elections were held, allowing people to express their will through the ballot. The defeat of the ruling government demonstrated the strength of Indian democracy and highlighted the importance of Democracy," an excerpt from the book read.

The Emergency section forms part of a broader discussion on challenges facing democratic systems. Alongside the Emergency, the textbook discusses issues such as fake news, misinformation, damaging public property, violation of public rules, poverty, regionalism, social discrimination and gender inequality as challenges to democratic practice. —*ANI*

The Emergency was a direct assault on our Constitution. It witnessed the suspension of civil liberties, curbs on freedom of expression, arrests of political leaders, journalists, social workers and an assault on institutions that are the bedrock of our democracy

—Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

The day (Emergency) is that dark chapter in the history of Indian democracy, when the arrogance and greed for power of Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party attempted to crush the soul of the Constitution, the freedom of the press, and the right to expression

—Amit Shah, Home Minister

'CJP is B-Team of terrorists'

Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke is heading an ongoing protest over examination irregularities in New Delhi —PTI

Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), dismissing it as the "B team of disruptive elements" and accusing its members of attempting to undermine democratic institutions under the guise of public protests.

Speaking to NDTV amid continuing demonstrations against him over the NEET-UG paper leak controversy and alleged irregularities in the education system, the Union Education Minister said the group's real intentions had been exposed. He alleged that people who had been "rejected in democracy" were now returning "in disguise" and targeting the system while backing forces seeking to divide the country.

The remarks come as the CJP, led by founder Abhijeet Dipke, has intensified protests at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, demanding Pradhan's resignation. The party has accused the government of failing to safeguard the integrity of national examinations, particularly after the NEET-UG paper leak row. Protesters have vowed to continue their agitation until the minister steps down.

Defending the government's handling of the issue, Pradhan said significant reforms had been introduced following the controversy. He maintained that lessons from past lapses had helped authorities strengthen security measures and ensure the successful conduct of the NEET-UG retest this year.

The minister also accused opposition leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, of politicising the issue and creating unnecessary anxiety among students. He said the government remained committed to conducting examinations in a fair, transparent and student-friendly manner while protecting the interests of millions of aspirants across the country. —*Agencies*

LETTERS

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SALAR ساہر

Demolitions bring uncertainty to Delhi's Yamuna Bazar

Their boats lay moored along the river bank as bulldozers rolled into Yamuna Bazar on Thursday. With their meagre settlements razed, families, who have for generations depended on the ebb and flow of the Yamuna for livelihood, stared out at the murky waters -- perhaps finding in it a likeness of their bleak futures.

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) carried out a demolition drive in Delhi's Yamuna Bazar area after issuing notices asking residents inhabiting settlements between Ghat No. 2 and 32 to vacate the protected Yamuna floodplain.

Carrying their little possessions on their backs as they marched towards looming uncertainty, and nearby shelter homes, the now-homeless population could only whimper, "The court has asked the authorities to listen to us, but they are not listening..." - a roaring bulldozer trampled over end the sentence.

"I have been sitting here since six in the morning, just watching," said Sudhakar Kumar Nishadraj.

Nishadraj operates a boat near Ghat No. 9, ferrying people and pilgrims across the Yamuna, and bringing families to immerse the ashes of their loved ones in the holy river.

"Two days ago, officials came and told us that everything must be removed by 25 June. We had seen it coming," he said, resignation in his voice. "Where do we go now," he asked, staring at the Yamuna.

Nishadraj said around 100 families whose lives depended on ferry services and religious rites on the Yamuna have been affected by the demolition, including eight or nine families who have for generations looked at the river for a living.

"My family has been doing this since my grandfather's grandfather. We have documents showing we go back nearly 150 years. We belong to the Nishad community. In the Ramayana, Nishadraj helped Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman cross the river. We consider ourselves descendants of that lineage, and this river has been our life," he said.

Besides ferry and ritual services, Nishadraj said he had cultivated on a small patch of land along the Yamuna bank to supplement his income.

"Now I have nothing. I have three children. My daughter and elder son are in first year of college, and my younger son is in Class 12. I don't know how I will pay their fees, or even support my family. We may have to move to Wazirabad, but rents are high and I don't even have an income anymore," he said.

LOSING THE RIVER

"If debris from the demolition falls into the river, my boat could be damaged too. That boat is everything I own."

Another boatman, who did not wish to be named, said his family had lived and worked along the Yamuna for nearly 200 years.

He recalled how, not long ago, a young girl jumped into the Yamuna in an attempt to end her life and local boatmen rescued her.

"This river is our livelihood. Whether taking people for boat rides, helping families perform last rites of their loved ones or rescuing someone in distress, this is what we have done all our lives. Today, we are being removed from the very place where we have known as our life," he said.

"We are not asking for luxury. We only want a place where we can pursue our livelihood. I have two kids and I need to send them to school, I also take care of my elderly parents' medical bills, what do I do now?"

Another resident, Rajesh, also said the demolition has left his family without any means of income.

"My grandfather did this work, my father too, and now I do the same. Our family has lived here for more than 150 years. We know no other work," he said.

"We were told to vacate, but no one told us how we are to survive. If we move away from the river, how will we operate our boats? This is not just about losing a home. We have lost the only livelihood our family has ever known," he lamented.

Rajesh said arranging rent would be a major hassle. The expenses of finding a new home, shifting, and simply daily sustenance would crush their family.

The DDA carried out the demolition drive in the Yamuna Bazar area a day after issuing fresh notices on June 23 asking residents to vacate 'illegal' settlements voluntarily, failing which the 'encroachments' would be removed.

The authorities have identified the area as part of the Yamuna's O-Zone, a protected no-construction floodplain under the management of the DDA.

Residents have been asked to move to nearby shelter homes. For many residents, however, the uncertainty extends beyond finding another place to live. They say moving away from the river would mean leaving behind an occupation that has defined their families for generations.

"The river is our life. Without it, we don't know how to begin again," Nishadraj said. —*PTI*

Delhi Development Authority carries out a demolition drive at Yamuna Bazar area to clear the encroachment, after fresh eviction notices were issued to the residents, in New Delhi, on Thursday —PTI

Beaten and barely fed: Labourers recall horror at UP factory

They hadn't seen vegetables in months, their rotis were made of cattle feed and they could sleep for no more than two-three hours. And that was just a snippet of the lives of the 12 bonded labourers rescued from a factory who recalled in harrowing detail their months of captivity and torture.

The worker's account offers a glimpse into the conditions inside the factory in Mandi village in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, where labourers from several states alleged they were lured with promises of jobs and accommodation, only to find themselves trapped behind locked gates and forced to work under constant surveillance.

On Thursday, officials at Titawi police station served food to the rescued labourers, many of whom bore visible injury marks on their legs, backs and waists. The workers, some of whom had been separated from their families for months, were seen eating meals provided by the police after their rescue earlier this week.

Twelve bonded labourers, including minors, bearing visible torture marks and injuries on their bodies, were rescued from the factory on Tuesday following a raid conducted by the administration and the police. The labourers were allegedly kept in inhuman conditions and were not paid the promised monthly wages, the police said.

For months, and in some cases more than a year, the workers lived behind locked gates, surviving on rotis made from chaff used for animal feed, sleeping for only a few hours and allegedly enduring routine beatings, threats and attacks by dogs.

Many were recruited from railway stations and bus stands with promises of monthly salaries of Rs 12,000-15,000, food, accommodation and eight-hour shifts.

Instead, they allege, they were locked inside the factory compound, stripped of their phones and identity documents, denied wages and forced to work almost round the clock.

"We were promised three meals a day, accommodation and an eight-hour duty," Sonu Chauhan of Agra, who had left home six months ago looking for work, told PTI videos.

Sonu said the gates were locked soon after he arrived.

"From the next day, we were made to work continuously. If we felt sleepy, we were beaten with belts. We were given only three or four rotis in 24 hours. We never saw vegetables or dal. We ate rotis made from bran meant for cattle, with salt and red chilli," he said.

Police personnel feed the rescued labourers —SCREENGRAB

The workers said a typical day began before dawn and stretched late into the night.

Ramu, a resident of Nainital in Uttarakhand, alleged that labourers were made to start work around 4 am and continue till midnight.

"We got only two or three hours to sleep. Even if someone was sick, there was no leave. We were told we would not leave the place alive," he said.

According to the workers, their tasks included operating disposable-plate machines, counting finished products, packaging them in plastic covers and filling sacks.

"There was never a moment when we were allowed to sit idle," one worker said.

The factory compound, they alleged, was designed to make escape nearly impossible. Workers described high boundary walls, multiple locked gates, CCTV cameras and pitbull dogs stationed inside and outside the premises.

"Inside there were cameras, outside there were cameras. There were dogs everywhere. We could not even think of escaping," a rescued worker told investigators.

Several labourers alleged they were routinely assaulted for slowing down, making mistakes or discussing escape plans.

According to their accounts, supervisors used belts, sticks and other objects to beat them. Some workers bore visible injury marks.

"The dogs were fed better than us. They got milk and meat. We got dry rotis," one said.

The police have said the rescued workers reported beaten, stabbed with spears, whipped, bitten by dogs and fed animal fodder.

The fear among them deepened with stories of workers who allegedly disappeared.

Rescued labourers told the police that Nepalese worker Arjun, also known as Topi, died after being tortured inside the factory in November last year.

The police on Thursday said a fresh case had been registered after workers alleged that Arjun died due to torture and his body was later disposed of after being packed in a bag.

Some workers claimed they witnessed others being beaten severely.

"There was a pistol kept there. Sometimes shots were fired into a wall to scare us. We were told that if we spoke to anyone, we would meet the same fate," a worker alleged.

The ordeal extended beyond the factory walls and into the homes of the labourers. For months, their families had no idea where these labourers were.

Mahak Singh, who travelled from Rajasthan after receiving a call from the police about his brother Vikram, said the family had searched for him for months.

"His phone stopped working. We contacted relatives and friends but nobody knew where he was. My mother fell ill due to stress. When we finally saw him, he looked completely different," he said.

A relative of another rescued worker from Bihar said the family had almost lost hope.

"We thought something terrible had happened. He had not called for months. Now he is back, but the physical and mental trauma is visible," he said.

The workers' release came after one of them allegedly managed to escape through an opening and reached Titawi police station. The police and labour department officials reached the factory, where 12 labourers, including minors, were rescued.

For many, freedom arrived with an emotional reunion.

Some said they had filed missing-person complaints after losing contact with their loved ones for months.

According to officials, four workers have already been reunited with their families while efforts are underway to trace the relatives of the others. Assistant Labour Commissioner Devesh Singh told PTI that each rescued labourer would be provided financial assistance under the rehabilitation scheme.

Police have arrested supervisor Shiva Tyagi, while factory owner Ankit Balyan remains absconding. A team has been formed to investigate. —*PTI*

— WIKIPEDIA

Pak bins reports that Israel tried to kill Munir

ISLAMABAD, 25 JUNE

Pakistani officials have dismissed as "baseless" and "complete nonsense" a claim by Brazilian journalist Pepe Escobar that Mossad planned to assassinate Pakistan Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir during a recent visit to Switzerland. Escobar alleged Pakistan received credible intelligence about an Israeli plot linked to meetings at the Burgenstock Resort during US-Iran talks, claiming Pakistan warned Israel through diplomatic channels, possibly via Oman. Pakistani security officials categorically denied the report, emphasising that the Prime Minister and Field Marshal Munir's Swiss visit proceeded without security concerns. Neither Israel nor Mossad has commented publicly. —*AGENCIES*

Kenyan police block roads ahead of protests

NAIROBI, 25 JUNE

Kenyan police set up roadblocks on Thursday to block access to Nairobi ahead of a protest marking two years since at least 60 people died in anti-government demonstrations. Families affected demand justice for victims, criticising the government's transparency in compensation efforts. President William Ruto stated that protests would be allowed but warned against attempts to "shut down the country," while Interior Minister Kipchumba Murkomen warned of infiltrators. Police barricaded major highways, Parliament, and closed businesses. Opposition leaders support the protests, demanding transparency. Edith Wanjiku, whose son was killed during the 2024 protests, expressed suffering, criticising the slow compensation process affecting only a few families. —*PTI*

S Korean church leader held for influencing polls

SEOUL, 25 JUNE

Lee Man-hee, leader of the secretive Shincheonji Church, was arrested on suspicion of election influence and illegal recruitment linked to the conservative People Power Party. The church denies the allegations, claiming about 200,000 followers. Investigations focus on the church's alleged pressure on over 50,000 followers to join the PPP from 2021 to 2024, aiming to influence elections and secure permits. Lee, 95, appeared at Seoul Central District Court, with the court citing concerns over evidence destruction. The church expressed "deep regret" at his arrest, citing his age and health. The case is part of broader probes into religious groups. —*PTI*

Indian tied to S'pore firms deserting workers

SINGAPORE, 25 JUNE

The Indian High Commission confirmed contact with over 400 workers from India and Bangladesh abandoned by three Singaporean companies. The companies — SK Industries, KPA Engineering, and VVR Plant Engineering — failed to pay wages or provide accommodation for months. Ramu Palani Velu, an Indian national, is identified as a director of seven firms, including those involved. The Migrant Workers' Centre and MOM are assisting workers by offering SGD 200 in cash, vouchers, accommodation, and job support. Ramu took over VVR Plant Engineering in 2025; he also owns several other companies registered recently. The Ministry of Manpower is investigating breaches by KPA Engineering and SK Industries. The workers await resolution. —*PTI*

The death toll from the massive twin earthquakes that rippled across Venezuela is likely to rise exponentially, as locals and rescuers sift through the carnage and find their loved ones. The US Geological Survey (USGS) predicts the toll could be anywhere between 10,000 and 1,00,000 —*PTI*

Fear grips Venezuela after massive quake

With no electricity or phone network in Caracas, many sleep on streets and in parks

CARACAS, 25 JUNE

Thousands of Venezuelans spent a sleepless night in streets, parks and open spaces after two powerful earthquakes devastated parts of the country, leaving survivors traumatised and desperately searching for missing loved ones.

As buildings swayed across Caracas on Wednesday evening, residents fled their homes in panic. Many watched in horror as walls collapsed, exposing furniture and entire rooms to the street. Columns of dust rose over neighbourhoods as the twin quakes struck a minute apart.

"It started off gently and then gradually grew, and in the end, we all had to leave our houses, go outside and gather together," said Caracas resident Hector Ricci.

Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello urged people to remain outdoors because of the risk of aftershocks. Hundreds spent the night huddled in parks, car parks and public squares, some clutching pets as dust and debris filled the air.

"We were afraid the buildings would collapse on us," said María Cristina Díaz, a 41-year-old janitor. "My mother, my daughter and I were cold. We didn't sleep a wink."

"It was awful. We cried, we screamed. Thankfully, we're alive," she added after seeking refuge in Plaza Candelaria, one of the few open spaces.

Rescue workers search through the rubble after an earthquake in Caracas, Venezuela on Wednesday —*PTI*

Parts of Caracas lost electricity and mobile phone coverage. Subway services were suspended, natural gas supplies shut off and schools closed, with some educational institutions converted into shelters and donation centres.

As communication networks struggled, anxious families searched for relatives. Missing-person notices and photographs flooded social media and public spaces.

In Catia La Mar, in the hardhit La Guaira state, residents waited helplessly outside collapsed buildings. Larry Rojas, 49, stood before a pile of rubble where members of his family remained trapped.

"There are people alive in there and no one is coming to save them," another woman said as she waited for news of her daughter buried beneath a 12-storey building.

Others recounted terrifying moments inside damaged homes. "The stairs came away, the whole wall cracked. Things fell from the ceiling," said Caracas resident Odalis Escalona.

Carmen Guedez, 69, said she huddled with her bedridden sister and a neighbour as windows shook violently. "We couldn't get out," she said.

One survivor of Caracas' 1967 earthquake said the latest disaster was unlike anything he had experienced, while another called the aftermath: "a horror movie." —*PTI*

Chinese Preimier Qiang with Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in China, on Thursday —*BANGLADESH PMO*

B'desh, China to boost cooperation on Teesta River management

BEIJING, 25 JUNE

- The Teesta project is a sensitive issue in India-Bangladesh relations. It flows from the eastern Himalayas through Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh

Bangladesh and China on Thursday agreed to strengthen cooperation in the management of the Teesta and other rivers.

The agreement was reached when Chinese water resources minister Li Guoying called on Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, who is currently in Beijing, the state-run Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) news agency reported.

Rahman is on his first foreign trip after becoming Prime Minister. He had visited Malaysia and is now participating in the World Economic Forum event in China's Dalian vity.

He met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang and highlighted Bangladesh's ongoing river excavation programme aimed at reducing flood risks, including the excavation of 20,000 km of rivers and canals over the next five years and improving water management in the Padma and Teesta rivers. He sought China's support in improving Bangladesh's water resource management, including technical assistance in the Teesta management project, and assistance in preventing riverbank erosion.

Referring to a Memorandum of Understanding signed between Dhaka and Beijing in 2005, Li said that bilateral cooperation between the two countries in water resource management is practical and research-based.

The two also inked 14 MoUs.

Rahman is also expected to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday.

The Teesta project is a sensitive issue in India-Bangladesh relations. It flows from the eastern Himalayas through Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh, where it is a key source of irrigation and livelihoods for millions of people. —*PTI*

Rubio says Gulf states also part of Iran deal as talks likely next week

ABU DABHI, 25 JUNE

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that the safety of the Gulf countries is also a part of the Iran deal, as he wrapped up his visit to the region on Thursday. This comes as Pakistan said that negotiations between the two sides are likely to resume next week, with US Vice President JD Vance telling a British broadcaster that it will likely be held in Doha to accommodate Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

He told reporters that Gulf allies shared some very serious concerns and that they wanted to be informed of every step of the peace accord, which includes provisions on the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway through which they export most of the oil needed to sustain their economies.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, on Thursday

Rubio dismissed the idea that Iran and Oman could impose a fee or toll structure. He asked how they planned to prevent ships that refuse to pay the toll from crossing.

"You shoot at one ship, you sink one ship, no other ship is going to move. So that sort of system is not only unwise; it can't happen. It's not even workable. So you might as well abandon the fantasy now," he told reporters, according to a government release.

He added that Iran threatening ships that are moving would be a violation of the interim agreement.

However, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Aragchi stated on X that discussions were progressing with Oman to impose the system.

The Gulf countries, for their part, are seeking US reasurance that they will be protected in the deal, having come under heavy fire from Iran for hosting American bases that were used for strikes. —*Salar News*

2 Republicans switch back & block war powers resolution

WASHINGTON, 25 JUNE

Two Republican Senators - Rand Paul and Bill Cassidy – switched their votes to block a war powers resolution that sought to curb Donald Trump's authority to use military force against Iran after the US President belittled them repeatedly.

The resolution failed 50-47 on a late-night procedural vote. The two had previously voted with the Democrats to pass the resolution.

Two Republicans, Sens Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins, voted with Democrats to advance the resolution. One Democrat, Sen. John Fetterman (Pennsylvania), voted against it.

Trump thanked Paul, Cassidy and ally Lindsey Graham: "This vote puts Iran on notice". —*ANI*

NATO gave airbases to let US strike Iran: Rutte

WASHINGTON, 25 JUNE

In a startling revelation, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said that around 4,000 to 5,000 US fighter jets took off from European bases to strike Iran during the war.

During a meeting with US President Donald Trump on Wednesday at the White House, Rutte also justified the military strikes against Iran, claiming that Tehran was "very near" to building a nuclear weapon, and that leaders of the G7 had applauded the US for its kinetic action.

Rutte claimed that Romania had to cut its commercial flights to allow US jets to take off, and added that Italian bases were also used. Rome quickly rejected his comments.

NATO head Mark Rutte and US President Donald Trump

Rutte, dubbed the 'Trump whisperer' because of his constant praise for the American President, added that US' NATO allies have tripled their defence spending after the Republican took office, calling it the "Trump Trillion". —*Agencies*

> **(Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a NATO member) was a prime candidate to go into the war with Iran — maybe on the Iran side, because he's not a big fan of Israel. I asked him to stay out. He stayed out**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

'If I had listened to US, wouldn't have won Gaza, Lebanon'

TEL AVIV, 25 JUNE

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday said Israel never sought "permission" from the United States before launching military operations, arguing that key campaigns would not have happened had his government yielded to American pressure.

Speaking at a local authorities conference, Netanyahu claimed former US President Joe Biden had warned Israel against entering Rafah in Gaza and threatened to halt military assistance. "There are moments when you must know how to tell even the President of the US what we stand for".

Referring to last year's 12-day conflict with Iran, Netanyahu said he informed US President Donald Trump about Israel's plans but did not seek approval. "To my joy, he also joined". Netanyahu dismissed critics who had opposed operations in Gaza, Rafah, Lebanon, Syria and Iran, saying they now argued Israel had not gone far enough. "They wanted zero, and now complain we achieved 80-90 per cent". —*Salar News*

> **As long as I am Prime Minister, Iran will not have nuclear weapons. As long as I am Prime Minister, we will maintain the security zone in Southern Lebanon. For as long as it takes**
>
> —Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister

AS EUROPE BOILS

UK 'climate meet' cancelled due to heat

LONDON, 25 JUNE

—MAGNIFIC

The London School of Economics has cancelled an event analysing measures to manage extreme heat by governments, planned as part of London Climate Action Week, due to record high temperatures in the UK.

The institution's Global School of Sustainability announced that the event — titled "Extreme Heat: Improving governance and strengthening action around the world" — had to be cancelled after the UK Met Office issued a red warning for extreme heat.

The Met Office has warned that temperatures in parts of the country could rise to 38 degree Celsius or higher on Thursday and Friday, as part of the ongoing heatwave, which has been in place since Sunday. A red warning for extreme heat has been extended to Friday for London and parts of south-east England.

The UK had the warmest June night on record on Wednesday, with overnight temperatures in Wales's capital Cardiff remaining at 23.5 degree Celsius and above.

The extreme weather comes amid a larger heatwave engulfing western Europe – the fastest warming continent in the world – including France and Spain. France experienced its hottest day ever, with the mercury nearing 41C in Paris. Bilbao in Spain saw temperatures of 42.5C. —*Salar News*

King Charles to become 1st monarch to reveal taxes

LONDON, 25 JUNE

King Charles III —*WIKIPEDIA*

King Charles III will become the first British monarch to reveal his personal tax bill on Thursday as part of "encourage wider understanding and accountability," as the palace faces growing public demand for transparency following the sexual abuse scandals around former prince Andrew.

Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor is under investigation for misconduct linked to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The disclosure will come during Buckingham Palace's annual sovereign grant briefing, which last year detailed how £86.3 million from the Treasury was spent.

Charles has previously released his tax bill as Prince, but this marks the first time he will do so as king. Prince William is expected to follow suit. Though not required to pay income tax, Charles does so voluntarily, inheriting an arrangement his mother made in 1993 after public anger over Windsor Castle's post-fire restoration.

Charles has a personal fortune of £680 million ($896 million), placing him at No 230 on the Sunday Times rich list.

His private income comes mainly from two estates, Balmoral in Scotland and Sandringham in England, plus savings and investments. —*PTI*

Gold declines Rs 2,800, silver drops Rs 5,000

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Gold prices declined by Rs 2,800 to Rs 1.45 lakh per 10 grams and silver by Rs 5,000 in the national capital on Thursday amid subdued demand in the market and weak global trends.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, gold of 99.9 per cent purity fell by Rs 2,800 to Rs 1,45,300 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous level of Rs 1,48,100 per 10 grams. Silver also weakened, falling by Rs 5,000 to Rs 2,26,000 per kg (inclusive of all taxes). The white metal had settled at Rs 2,31,000 per kg in the preceding session—*PTI*

Rupee climbs 16P to close at 94.39 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

The rupee gained 16 paise to settle at 94.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, supported by falling global crude oil prices.

Positive domestic equity sentiment and a marginally weaker dollar aided the local currency, though FII outflows limited sharper gains. The rupee opened at 94.30 and traded between 94.13 and 94.56. It rose 21 paise from Wednesday's close of 94.55. Anuj Choudhary of Mirae Asset ShareKhan cited declining commodity prices and a softening US dollar as reasons for the strength. Brent crude was trading at USD 72.76, down 1.33 per cent.

The Sensex rose 109.25 points to 77,100.47, while the Nifty increased 34.35 points to 24,056. Foreign investors sold Rs 1,843.40 crore. —*PTI*

Alpha Wave sells 1.93% in Delhivery, shares drop 2%

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Global asset manager Alpha Wave Global has exited logistics firm Delhivery by selling its entire 1.93 per cent stake for Rs 665 crore via open market transactions. Following the sale, Delhivery's shares declined 2.21 per cent to Rs 470.40 on the NSE and 2.15 per cent to Rs 470.25 on the BSE. Alpha Wave Ventures, LP, offloaded 1,44,44,800 shares in two tranches at Rs 460.03-460.36 each, with a total deal value of Rs 664.74 crore. Meanwhile, Nexus Venture Partners sold over 43 lakh shares for Rs 208 crore, and Mirae Asset Venture Investments divested roughly 1 per cent of Shadowfax Technologies for Rs 120 crore, with its shares falling nearly 2 per cent to Rs 224.75. —*PTI*

Andhra signs pact for 10,000 daily drone flights

AMARAVATI/NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

The Andhra Pradesh government has signed an initial memorandum of understanding with Bengaluru-based aerospace company Airbound to develop a scalable drone delivery network across the Amaravati Capital Region. The collaboration aims to facilitate 10,000 drone flights daily to expedite healthcare supplies, commercial goods, and critical consignments. AThe agreement, signed between Andhra Pradesh Drone Corporation (APDC) and Airbound in the presence of Union Civil Aviation Minister Rammohan Naidu, seeks to establish one of the world's largest drone ecosystems, strengthening future logistics infrastructure and positioning Andhra Pradesh as a global drone hub —*PTI*

Oil prices dip to pre-war levels, will flights get cheaper?

Govt may ask airlines to review surcharges, prices as crude touches $72

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

A sharp fall in global crude oil prices to pre-conflict levels has raised hopes of lower airfares, with Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu indicating that the government may ask airlines to review fuel surcharges and additional fare components if fuel prices remain stable.

Brent crude fell to around $72 a barrel on Thursday, returning to levels seen before the recent US-Iran conflict. The decline follows a 4 per cent drop in the previous session as concerns over disruptions to oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz eased.

Brent crude was trading at $72.28 a barrel, while US benchmark WTI stood at $69.15. Oil prices have retreated after signs of de-escalation in West Asia, including the movement of previously stranded tankers through the Strait of Hormuz and improving shipping conditions in the region.

Speaking in Varanasi, Naidu said the Centre was closely monitoring Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices and assessing whether the recent decline in fuel costs would be sustained.

The minister noted that the past four months had been particularly challenging for the aviation sector. He added that once the government is convinced that price stability will continue, it will engage with airlines on reducing surge charges and other additional fare components currently being levied on passengers.

The conflict involving Iran had severely impacted the Indian aviation sector by disrupting global crude oil supplies and restricting access to key air corridors over the Gulf region. The resulting spike in ATF prices significantly increased operating costs for airlines, prompting fare hikes and capacity reductions. Major carriers, including Air India and IndiGo, reduced capacity on select domestic and international routes to conserve cash amid rising fuel bills and softer demand. Several airlines introduced fuel surcharges to offset the steep increase in ATF costs. —*PTI*

REOPENING OF HORMUZ WILL MAKE SUPPLY NORMALISATION COSTLY: S&P

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

S&P Global Ratings on Thursday said the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz would lower tail risk for Asia Pacific region, but supply normalisation will be uneven and costly.

"Shipping, insurance, port, and operational constraints could also delay a return to pre-conflict flows," S&P said in its report titled 'Hormuz reopens, fragility remains'.

S&P maintains Brent assumption at USD 110 per barrel on average for the rest of 2026, before lowering it to USD 80/bbl in 2027 and USD 65/bbl from 2028.

Brent crude prices have retreated to below USD 80 and the liquefied natural gas Japan Korea Marker (LNG JKM) is near USD 15 per million British thermal units (MMBtu) after the MoU.

Slow resumption of flows could keep energy, freight, and input-cost pressure elevated across petrochemicals, agriculture, transportation, and logistics. Most exposed are energy, downstream sectors, and emerging markets with thin external and fiscal buffers, S&P said.

The Strait of Hormuz also carries refined fuels, naphtha, fertilisers, and industrial feedstocks, so slower flows can have effects beyond energy. —*PTI*

PUSHES FOR FASTER GROWTH

Amazon's CEO, Andy Jassy meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Thursday —*PTI*

Amazon CEO meets PM; to invest $13B in AI

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Amazon will invest an additional USD 13 billion in India, taking its planned capital commitment in the country to USD 48 billion between 2026 and 2030, Chief Executive Officer Andy Jassy said on Thursday after meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The fresh investment underscores Amazon's long-term commitment to India, which Jassy described as one of the company's most important growth markets globally.

He said Amazon's India business is seeing strong momentum, driven by robust customer demand across e-commerce and Amazon Web Services (AWS), its cloud-computing division.

Amazon has invested heavily in India over the past decade, building out logistics networks, technology infrastructure and digital services as it seeks to deepen its presence in one of the world's fastest-growing major economies.

"A great meeting with Mr. Andy Jassy. I welcome Amazon's record USD 48 billion investment in India. This will create new opportunities for our youth," Prime Minister Modi said in a post on X.

The Amazon top boss discussed the company's plans to invest USD 48 billion over the coming five years, including more than USD 21 billion in AI and cloud infrastructure.

By 2030, Amazon plans to support 3.8 million jobs, enable USD 80 billion in e-commerce exports, and bring the benefits of AI to 15 million small businesses and four million government school students, Amazon's top executive said.

The latest investment pledge positions Amazon as one of the largest global AI and cloud infrastructure investors in India, the US-headquartered e-commerce giant added.

"We are inspired by Prime Minister Modi's vision of a Viksit and Atmanirbhar Bharat, and we are committed to being a long-term partner in India's growth story," said the company. —*PTI*

Mkts extend gains as falling oil boosts sentiment

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

Indian equity benchmarks extended gains for a second straight session on Thursday, supported by falling crude oil prices, strong global cues and buying in auto, aviation and banking stocks.

The BSE Sensex rose 109.25 points, or 0.14 per cent, to close at 77,100.47, while the NSE Nifty gained 34.35 points, or 0.14 per cent, to settle at 24,056.

The Sensex opened firmly and surged as much as 811.96 points, or 1 per cent, during the day to touch a high of 77,803.18. However, profit-booking in information technology and metal shares pared most of the gains in the latter half of the session. The Nifty touched an intraday high of 24,261.60 before retreating.

Among Sensex constituents, InterGlobe Aviation, parent of IndiGo, emerged as the top gainer, rising 4.82 per cent as lower crude prices improved the outlook for airline fuel costs. Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank and Hindustan Unilever also ended higher.

On the other hand, Power Grid, Bharat Electronics, Tech Mahindra, Infosys and Bharti Airtel were among the major losers.

Analysts said easing geopolitical tensions in West Asia and softer oil prices boosted risk appetite. Positive global sentiment was further supported by strong earnings and upbeat guidance from US chipmaker Micron, reviving optimism around technology and artificial intelligence sectors.

Asian markets closed mostly higher, with South Korea's Kospi surging 5.42 per cent and Japan's Nikkei jumping 4.61 per cent. Shanghai ended marginally higher, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng slipped. European markets were trading in positive territory, while US markets had ended mixed overnight.

Broader markets underperformed, with the BSE MidCap Select index falling 0.55 per cent and the SmallCap Select index declining 0.37 per cent. Auto stocks led sectoral gains, rising 2.29 per cent, while metal, oil and gas, and utilities indices were among the worst performers.

Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth 1,843.40 crore on Wednesday. Stock, commodity and money markets will remain closed on Friday on account of Muharram. —*PTI*

The Sensex opened firmly and surged as much as 811.96 points, or 1 per cent, during the day to touch a high of 77,803.18 –*AI*

Stainless steel sector MSMEs flag import surge

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

Over 100 MSME players in the stainless steel sector have urged the government to reintroduce the quality control order, citing a surge in Chinese imports following its revocation to ease raw material sourcing.

The steel ministry, ON 27 April, suspended the QCO mandating BIS-certified items for stainless steel products. industry bodies Stainless Steel Induction Furnace Association and Stainless Steel Re-Rollers Association said, "The suspension of QCO has opened the door for a surge of low-priced imports from China, placing domestic MSME manufacturers under severe pressure and threatening thousands of jobs." —*PTI*

India initiates anti-dumping probe against 3 Chinese products

NEW DELHI, 25 JUNE

India has initiated an anti-dumping probe against imports of thermal paper, Biaxially Oriented Polyamide (BOPA) film, and certain antioxidants from China, following separate complaints by domestic manufacturers, according to a commerce ministry notification.

Four applications have been filed by separate domestic firms before the ministry's Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) to initiate the probe.

Vinati Organics Ltd has filed the application against imports of certain antioxidants, used in the polymer industry, from China, Korea and Singapore.

JPFL Films has sought a probe against imports of 'Biaxially Oriented Polyamide (BOPA) Film', used in the packaging industry, exported by China and Thailand.

The Indian Association of Thermal Paper Manufacturers' and Allied Industries have filed an application against imports of 'Thermal Paper or Thermal Sensitive Paper' from the United States, China, and South Korea.

ITC Ltd has sought sunset review of anti-dumping duty imposed on imports of Decor Paper imported from China.

According to the DGTR's notifications, all the applicants have alleged that dumped imports of the goods from these countries are causing material injury to the domestic industries.

They have requested for the imposition of anti-dumping duty on the imports to guard domestic firms against the impact of cheap inbound shipments. —*PTI*

Four applications have been filed by separate domestic firms before DGTR to initiate tanti-dumping probe against imports of thermal pape –*AI*

MAPS PROVIDED GIRL'S LOCATION

Snap sued after minor raped by man she met on app

MISSOURI, 25 JUNE

The parents of a Missouri girl who was raped after meeting an adult she met on Snapchat have sued the app's parent company, Snap, and the attacker in state court.

The lawsuit, filed on Wednesday, alleges Snap refused to disable dangerous features or warn parents about risks. It says the girl began using Snapchat in 2021 at age 11 without her parents' knowledge and that children can easily bypass the app's 13 plus age requirement. About a year later, the complaint claims Snapchat recommended the girl and other local teen girls as friends to defendant Gabriel Joel Valentin Rios, a 25 year old

stranger with no real life ties to them, without warning about the danger of connecting to strangers.

After connecting, Valentin Rios reportedly sent unsolicited nude photographs; the suit says Snapchat's product design made it "impossible" for the girl to avoid explicit content. The complaint also alleges Snap's Snap Maps provided Valentin Rios with the girl's home address without her knowledge. He then groomed her, falsely claiming to be a 17 year old local, persuaded her to meet in person and raped her. Valentin Rios pleaded guilty to statutory rape and is serving an 18 year sentence. The girl has been diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety and depression.

The plaintiffs seek unspecified damages and want the court to force Snap to stop practices they say harm children. Matthew Bergman of the Social Media Victims Law Centre, which brought the suit, said Snap's design "made it easy for a predator to reach and manipulate an unsuspecting child." Snap did not immediately comment. The case follows other actions against Snap, including a 2024 New Mexico suit alleging the platform fosters sextortion and sexual abuse; a judge denied Snap's motion to dismiss that case. —*PTI*

RBI puts Rs 1 lakh crore NBFCs in Upper Layer

MUMBAI, 25 JUNE

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued a revised framework for identifying Upper Layer Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFC-ULs), stating that NBFCs with an asset size of Rs 1 lakh crore and above will automatically be classified in the Upper Layer category.

The regulator also said the threshold will now be reviewed every three years, instead of every five years as proposed in the draft framework. The revised norms came into effect on 24 June.

Additionally, government-owned NBFCs that meet the eligibility criteria will now be considered for inclusion in the Upper Layer category. However, such entities will not be required to list on stock exchanges.

The central bank's move could strengthen the case for the public listing of Tata Sons, the principal holding company of the Tata Group. With an estimated asset base of around Rs 1.75 lakh crore, Tata Sons comfortably exceeds the threshold and is likely to remain classified as an Upper Layer NBFC.

Tata Sons has been seeking regulatory relief through its application to surrender its registration as a Core Investment Company (CIC). — *PTI*

World Cup is half over, but the drama is just getting started

MIAMI GARDENS, 25 JUNE

It's halftime at the World Cup. Take a break, everyone.

Wednesday marked the midpoint of the 104-match tournament — technically, just past the midpoint, with 54 matches now in the books and 50 remaining before a World Cup champion is crowned in East Rutherford, New Jersey, on 19 July.

The US has reached the Round of 32, which shouldn't be surprising. Mexico and Canada, the other host nations for this biggest World Cup in history, are also through to the knockout stage. And the stars are positively shining: Argentina's Lionel Messi has five goals to kick-start what he hopes is a run toward a second consecutive World Cup title.

France's Kylian Mbappé has four, as do Norway's Erling Haaland and Brazil's Vinicius Júnior.

Stadiums are mostly filled; FIFA is touting record attendance. And there have been some feel-good stories, most notably the tale of Cape Verde goalie Vozinha and how his mother was able to come to this World Cup.

"The best is yet to come," FIFA President Gianni Infantino told SNTV earlier this week.In other words, the second half of this tournament — just like the second half of matches — is when things might get really good.

KEY MATCHES LEFT

- Australia-Paraguay is a win-and-you're-in game.
- A winner of Japan-Sweden would be assured a Round of 32 spot, as would a winner of Austria-Algeria.
- Tiny Cape Verde would be into the knockout round with a win over Saudi Arabia.
- Colombia-Portugal will decide the winner of Group K.

WHO'S IN

Through Wednesday's games, 13 teams have clinched spots in the Round of 32.

Mexico won Group A, Switzerland won Group B, Brazil won Group C, the U.S. won Group D, Germany won Group E and Argentina won Group J. France, Norway, Canada, Morocco, Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and South Africa also are assured of moving into the knockout stage.

WHO'S OUT

A handful of teams already know they'll be among the 16 that don't survive the group stage and reach the Round of 32. The Czech Republic, Haiti, Turkey, Tunisia, Jordan, Qatar and Panama are certain to not advance. *—PTI*

South Africa reaches World Cup knockout with 1-0 win over South Korea

GUADALUPE, 25 JUNE

South Africa advanced to the knockout phase of the World Cup for the first time with a 1-0 victory over South Korea on Wednesday night.

Thapelo Maseko scored in the 63rd minute off a precise cross from Tshepang Moremi and South Africa finished in second place in Group A behind Mexico, which won all three of its group-stage games.

South Africa will take on Canada, the second-place finisher in Group B, in a knockout game Sunday at Inglewood, California.

Maseko had five total shots in the match and leads South Africa with eight shots in the tournament.

When Maseko was asked what he would tell his younger self about his accomplishment, the Mamelodi Sundowns forward said: "The one thing I would say is keep dreaming.'"

South Africa had opened its World Cup with a 2-0 loss to Mexico before using a late goal to earn a 1-1 draw with Czech Republic. It entered its final group-stage needing to defeat South Korea in order to advance. Bafana Bafana had failed to advance from the group stage in 1998, 2002 and as host in 2010. South Africa head coach Hugo Broos described the faith he had in his team despite the difficult start to the tournament.

"The mentality in this group is amazing," Broos said. "Everybody is working for everybody. We are not afraid of other teams."

South Korea opened this World Cup with a 2-1 come-from-behind win over Czech Republic and lost to Mexico 1-0 in its second game. The Taegeuk Warriors could still advance in the tournament, pending the results of other games this week.

South Korea became the first Asian team to reach the knockout round in 2002, when it finished fourth overall. The Taegeuk Warriors also advanced out of the group stage in 2010 and 2022, both times reaching the round of 16. *—PTI*

Switzerland wraps up first place in Group B

VANCOUVER, 25 JUNE

Switzerland put a damper on Canada's World Cup party in Vancouver.

The Swiss got goals from Rubén Vargas and Johan Manzambi to beat Canada 2-1 on Wednesday and win Group B. Now Switzerland will get a week of rest before returning to the same city to face one of the eight best third-place finishers on 2 July.

"I think that we deserve to be where we are right now," Switzerland coach Murat Yakin said. "In three days from now, we will know the opponent of the next match, and now we have the possibility to watch this tournament, and to watch the matches, and we will take what we will get." Canada dropped to second place in the group and will play in the knockout round for the first time in team history. But the Canadians had been hoping for a win or a draw on Wednesday so they would play their round of 32 match on home soil. Instead, Canada will travel Inglewood, California, for its next game on Sunday against the second-place finisher in Group A. *—PTI*

Mexico beats Czech 3-0 to win all 3 group-stage matches

MEXICO CITY, 25 JUNE

Mateo Chávez and Julián Quiñones scored in a six-minute span early in the second half, and Mexico beat the Czech Republic 3-0 on Wednesday night to win all three of its World Cup group-stage matches for the first time.

The 22-year-old Chávez, in his first World Cup, opened the scoring in the 55th minute and Quiñones scored his second goal of the tournament in the 61st. Alvaro Fidalgo added a goal in second-half stoppage time.

Mexico's previous best group-stage performance was two wins and one draw, done in 1986 and 2002 and both featuring Javier Aguirre, the first as a midfielder and the second as El Tri's coach. Aguirre is back as coach this year, his third stint leading the team.

Already the winner of Group A, Mexico will play again at Estadio Azteca on Tuesday in a round-of-32 match against an opponent to be determined.

Mexico is undefeated at nine World Cup matches at the massive stadium, which was packed with 80,824 fans on Wednesday. El Tri has only two losses at Azteca, most recently in World Cup qualifying against Honduras on Sept. 6, 2013.

The match included nods to Mexico's past and future. Gilberto Mora, 17, became the youngest Mexico player to start in a World Cup. And 40-year-old goalkeeper Guillermo "Memo" Ochoa entered in the 77th minute, joining Argentina's Lionel Messi and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo as the only players to appear in six WCs. *—PTI*

Mexico goalkeeper Raul Rangel (1) clears the ball from his goal during the World Cup Group A soccer match between Czechia and Mexico in Mexico City *—PTI*

BRAZIL SUPERSTAR

'Our idol is back': Neymar debuts in this World Cup

MIAMI GARDENS, 25 JUNE

- Brazil said earlier this week that he would be available, clearing the way for the forward to make his debut after missing the first two matches because of a right calf injury

Neymar has finally played in this World Cup, and Brazil has a superstar back in time for the knockout rounds.

Neymar checked in during the 76th minute against Scotland on Wednesday, with the team leading 3-0 and well on its way to clinching a spot in the knockout stage that starts next week. Brazil won by that score.

His appearance wasn't a surprise: Brazil said earlier this week that he would be available, clearing the way for the forward to make his debut after missing the first two matches because of a right calf injury.

It was his first appearance for Brazil since 2023.

"I'm very happy to be wearing the national team jersey again after three years," he told Brazilian media, following an emotional embrace with his family before he left the field. "I feel fine physically. Obviously, it was tough being sidelined for all those days."

He did not start, and it seemed like that was the plan Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti had all along when he raised the possibility earlier this week that Neymar could play as a substitute.

And when Neymar got off the bench to start doing some warmup sprints and stretches along the sideline during the second half, fans in that area absolutely roared. The cheers got louder when he checked in, as well as when he made his first touch.

"A very important moment for all of us," Vinícius Júnior, who scored two goals for Brazil, said in Portuguese. "Our idol is back, a guy who always fought hard and did everything to be here, returning after a spell out with injury. I hope he can keep evolving and keep improving, helping us throughout the competition. That's what matters most."

Neymar acknowledged the reaction from the Brazil fans.

"It was a mix of emotions when I came on, because it had been a long time away from the national team," he said. "Thank God everything went well and I was able to return." *—PTI*

Haiti finally scores again at a World Cup after 52 years

ATLANTA, 25 JUNE

Haiti capped its third straight loss at this year's World Cup with a heart-warming moral victory. The Haitians, playing on soccer's biggest stage for the first time since 1974, twice took the lead against 2022 semi-finalist Morocco on Wednesday but still lost 4-2.

It was those two goals that made this latest setback so much easier to take, even to celebrate.

"We're doing all this noise because my country scored two goals," said longtime fan Emmanuel Joseph, who kept the crowd cheering throughout the night with his red horn. "Haiti has already come to this World Cup after 52 years. For that, we are happy."

Haiti opened with a 1-0 loss to Scotland, then dropped its second game to five-time World Cup champion Brazil 3-0, eliminating the Caribbean team from contention for the round of 32.

Haiti forward Lenny Joseph had a hand, or a foot, in his team taking the lead on Wednesday in the 10th minute after a low cross from Jean-Kevin Duverne. He back-heeled the ball off the back of Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou and into the net. Bounou was saddled with an own-goal by FIFA, but it was a spectacular effort by Joseph.

Thirty-three minutes later, Morocco scored to make it 1-1, forward Wilson Isador again put Haiti in front. Three unanswered goals followed for Morocco, which earned a spot in the knockout round.

The crowd of 68,239 in Atlanta was a near 50-50 split of blue Haiti jerseys and red Morocco shirts, but the Haitian fans kept the noise going throughout the night with cheers echoing throughout the stadium.

"I'm disappointed for the Haitian fans, disappointed," Haiti coach Sébastien Migné said. "But also we managed to show that we were worthy of this qualification. We were in the right place." *—PTI*

INDIA GRAPPLE WITH VAIBHAV INCLUSION; FOCUS ON SAMSON, KISHAN, ABHISHEK

BELFAST, 25 JUNE

Accommodating teenage sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi in the starting 11 will be the toughest riddle for the team management when India step into a new T20 era under Shreyas Iyer in the first of a two-match series against Ireland here on Friday.

There is heightened interest over Sooryavanshi's international debut after the 15-year-old's stunning IPL run and a marauding 29-ball 94 for India A against Sri Lanka A in a tri-series one-day match.

Currently, India's top three are: Sanju Samson, Abhishek Sharma and Ishan Kishan. Samson, Abhishek and Kishan made fifties in the ICC T20 World Cup final win over New Zealand in March, which was also India's last assignment in the shortest format.

If the management wants to include Sooryavanshi, an opener, then one of Samson or Abhishek will have to go down or sit out. The bigwigs can push Samson down to the middle-order.

However, it traditionally belongs to an all-rounder and India have multiple choices in Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel. Head coach Gautam Gambhir and Iyer will have to think, whether to hand a debut to Sooryavanshi or keep the winning combination intact. *—PTI*

England storms into Women's T20 World Cup semifinals

LONDON, 25 JUNE

Host England was first into the Women's Twenty20 World Cup semifinals with a group match to spare after beating the West Indies by 38 runs at sweltering Lord's on Wednesday.

Both former one-time champions came to the matchup unbeaten, and Danni Wyatt-Hodge batted England out of reach with 65 off 42 balls. Wyatt-Hodge is the tournament's leading run-scorer with 193, averaging 65.

The West Indies can still advance if it beats winless Ireland in its last group match on Saturday.

On the hottest June day on record in Britain the evening game started at 35 degrees C and an air temperature of 41 C, and England made an impressive 186-7, the highest women's T20 total at Lord's and the second highest by a men's or women's side. No team has chased down 187 at a World Cup and West Indies was limited to 148-5.

Wyatt-Hodge, who launched the tournament two weeks ago with a century against Sri Lanka, smacked a 32-ball fifty. She should have been run out on 58 and caught on 59 and was finally run out on 65 by partner Heather Knight. She hit eight boundaries. *—PTI*

NEW ZEALAND WINS TOSS AND BATS 1ST IN DECIDING TEST AGAINST ENG

NOTTINGHAM, 25 JUNE

New Zealand won the toss against England and opted to bat first in the third and deciding test at a sweltering Trent Bridge on Thursday.

The series is tied at 1-1 and the weather might have a big role in Nottingham, where uncommon temperatures in Britain of 31 C (88 F) are forecast and a dry surface looks good for the batters.

England is attempting to steady itself after a crisis by captain Ben Stokes and fast bowler Gus Atkinson having a night out after the first-test win at Lord's. They were dropped for the second test — won convincingly by the Kiwis — but have been recalled for Nottingham, with Stokes reclaiming the captaincy from Joe Root. Wicketkeeper Jamie Smith is back from paternity leave and Shoaib Bashir is in as a spin option, replacing pacer Sonny Baker.

New Zealand has lost two key players — strike bowler Matt Henry and middle-order batter Glenn Phillips — because of injury, while pacer Kyle Jamieson is rested to manage his workload after recent back problems. *—PTI*